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THE TOWER WALL

THE TOWER WALL

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BY

ALICE GRANT ROSMAN

AUTHOR OF "MISS BRYDE OF ENGLAND"

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We build with strength the deep tower wall
That shall be shattered thus and thus.

ALICE MEYNELL.

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TO MY SISTER MARY

CONTENTS

Chapter		*Page*
I	LOSING YOURSELF IN LONDON	1
II	THE ENGLISH MAIL	12
III	THE MOTHER OF JULIEN	23
IV	A CHARMING YOUNG CREATURE	34
V	THE MEETING	40
VI	THE THIN EDGE OF THE WEDGE	53
VII	TARRANT SQUARE	64
VIII	PENELOPE STAYS AT HOME	74
IX	TONY—SOCIALIST	87
X	REVOLT	98
XI	THE GLORIOUS ADVENTURE	108
XII	ELIZABETH'S DAUGHTER	120
XIII	DEFENCES DOWN	131
XIV	FRANCES ARRANGES THE STAGE	151
XV	THE GLASS CASE	159
XVI	TONY'S POOR DEAR GIRLS	183

Chapter		*Page*
XVII	LOVERS' MEETINGS	198
XVIII	THE FORTY-NINTH TOAST RACK .	221
XIX	SPELLING IT WITH AN "I" . .	234
XX	THE ROAD TO—ARCADY . . .	250
XXI	THE LETTER	263
XXII	BREAKING IT GENTLY . . .	274
XXIII	ARTHUR STANDISH, WORM . .	287
XXIV	THE OTHER WOMAN . . .	296

CHAPTER I

LOSING YOURSELF IN LONDON

"We build with strength the deep tower wall
That shall be shattered thus and thus."

Alice Meynell.

I

AUTUMN was riding down the winds in London the afternoon that George McMorris and Frances Cowle, still unknown to each other, approached the same destination in Buckingham Gate. The grey old city, with its harsh outlines of new commerce and its bewildering graces of ancient spires and trees, might have been a ghost country and the leaves that went swishing down the windy streets, the ghostly feet that walked there, for everywhere the same white shroud of mist lay over it, and the trees, robbed by the strong season, were bare and desolate.

To both these people, converging haphazard as it were out of a busy world, the day's chill lovelinesses had their own appeal. McMorris saw the streets austere and empty and his delight was born of colour and line and occasional shadowy perspectives, but Mrs. Cowle caught all the picture, the hastening, eager, crowding throng, the slow traffic and the shape of this dim London sliding by. And although she had known these things for twenty years they still had power to rouse in her a passionate delight.

A block in the traffic when he was already in view of his aunt's house gave McMorris an opportunity to cross the road, and, passing close to her waiting car, he

noticed Mrs. Cowle, attracted partly by the vivid blue of her gown, exquisite in picture and in detail, and partly by the look of pleased attention in her unconscious face. At the same moment she looked at her watch and on an impulse born of a perfectly childish desire to experience the drive again, told the chauffeur to turn back.

McMorris heard her order without heeding it and went on, wondering why her face had seemed familiar. He found no clue to the mystery however, until someone suddenly provided it later in the afternoon.

Mrs. Standish had ordered his appearance in time for tea, and he was obeying—relation-like—because he had nothing better to do, although he liked his aunt in spite of the relationship and often found her plots and plans amusing.

Mrs. Standish was a rather wealthy woman of unfashionable tastes, well off enough to be able to dress as badly as she pleased—which appeared to be very badly indeed—and with a sharp tongue that covered a multitude of kindly impulses. She had an insatiable habit of putting her finger in other people's pies, but at least she drew out the plums for their consumption, and not her own, and her favourite hobby was Rescue Work on a large scale. She rescued, for instance, the many daughters of her more conventional friends, had them at her house in fluttering battalions and gave them a sporting chance at matrimony—didn't her nephew know it?

She collected people like a connoisseur—she called them types—coerced them unmercifully for each other's benefit and generally had a dozen plots going forward to introduce you to somebody for your own undoing.

McMorris wondered what the mischief might chance to be on this occasion, and concluding it was chiefly matrimonial, turned a plaintive eye upon his aunt.

"I hope it is not the pink young thing who is unappreciated by her family," he said as he had tea, "for I am not feeling very strong this afternoon."

"Ah," said Mrs. Standish drily, "that is unfortunate

because the world cannot be expected to get on without you of course. However let us hope the weakness will not prove fatal, and perhaps in the meantime you'll go and talk to Penelope Crozier. You know her, don't you? Or possibly not, as she happens to be your first cousin."

Since Penelope belonged to one of the many ramifications of the family he never troubled himself about, the shaft was well aimed and McMorris smiled his appreciation as he strolled across the room in her direction, stopping as often as possible to exchange civilities with choice spirits on the way.

"I have been ordered to talk to you," he told her, arriving at last.

"What have I done?" enquired Penelope, who disliked him so much that she was always afraid he might not know it. As a matter of fact the possibility had never occurred to him and he only thought she was trying to be witty in the rather feeble manner of her sex.

"You have such charming manners," he assured her, "I believe you must be a militant anti-suffragette."

"I daresay you would like me to be."

"Penelope, I hope you are not proposing to me, but it sounds jolly like it you know; one of those subtle modern proposals you get in novels, which the other person always manages to understand with such indecent haste. Now in my young days it was considered the thing to be coy and—"

"Hadn't you better reserve your little lecturette on modern novels until Mrs. Cowle comes," suggested Penelope unpleasantly. "It seems a pity it should be wasted on me."

"Mrs. Cowle? Not Frances Cowle?" McMorris suddenly had a vision of the autumn street, dim grey in the lengthening afternoon and the trim line of the waiting traffic. "Why, you don't mean to tell me she is coming here to-day?" he said, and had an instant hint of what his aunt was up to. His own occasional contributions to the reviews had attracted some notice and he knew his aunt well enough to feel sure she could appreciate these small triumphs, even though she had

known him in his cradle, a perennial handicap to the admiration of lesser minds.

Just how Mrs. Cowle, the novelist and playwright, eminent as she was in her own line, could be of use to him he did not see at the moment, although it was clear his aunt did and the situation began to interest him. The Standishes he knew regarded Frances Cowle with unusual fervour, not for her literary value which did not trouble them in the least, but " for herself alone " as he flippantly expressed it. She rarely came there, however, with the crowd, was elusive, shy they called it, though McMorris argued firmly that he had never yet known a woman-writer who was that.

" Goodness," exclaimed the pink and white girl, " do you mean the Frances Cowle who wrote that ripping book ? You know—I can't think what the name of it was, but it was fearfully ripping and so sad. I remember—I wept buckets of tears over it."

" I hope I shan't have to talk to her then," said a tired young man, " because I'm terrified of celebrities. They always make me feel such a poor worm—a worm that has no turning, what ! "

" It used to be a lane," said Penelope, who was sometimes given to be instructive, " but never mind, I will monopolise Mrs. Cowle—if I get a chance. I'm simply pining to meet her."

" Poor Penelope ! " said George McMorris sympathetically, " Then I'm afraid you'll fade away before our very eyes, for *she* won't come."

" Mrs. Cowle ! " announced a footman from the door.

" Aha ! " said Penelope to McMorris under her breath.

A tall woman dressed in vivid blue came into the long drawing-room, and there was a sudden silence as all eyes turned to watch her. It was a very appropriate entrance for the celebrity, and at that moment Frances Cowle certainly seemed to fit the picture from every point of view. Her really beautiful clothes, a kind of studied aloofness in her advance upon the company, and her keen eyes all marked her for distinction, but

McMorris, still conscious of the more pleasing picture of her half an hour before, felt himself repelled. He was remembering that she had been almost here all that time ago and that he had heard her deliberately tell the chauffeur to turn back, and he said to himself contemptuously :—

"She was determined to be late and make an effective entry. Poser!"

"My dear, I am so glad you have got here after all," said Mrs. Standish with something like real affection in her usually dry tones, "I was almost beginning to be afraid—"

"We were held up by the traffic," smiled Mrs. Cowle.

And—"Liar!" said George McMorris gently to himself.

"Something ought to be *done* about the traffic," announced a stout lady, successfully upholstered in brocade, "and you didn't lose your way then? Ah, but you are so clever. Now I invariably do when I go to a place alone."

"Oh, but one *can* in London, can't one?" added somebody, and all round Mrs. Cowle voices took up the discussion ardently as something profound and only just discovered.

"They say London is the best place in the world to lose yourself in if you really want to."

"Yes, I was reading a case only the other day of a man who searched for his son in London for twenty years before he found him."

"I say, that is drawing the long bow surely?"

"My dear it was in the papers."

"That settles it," said McMorris darkly, and the pink and white girl turning reproachful eyes upon him exclaimed—

"But they do exaggerate sometimes."

"The names were given. I assure you it was absolutely true," declared the first speaker.

"Dear, dear." The brocaded lady appealed to Mrs. Cowle. "Now, would you have believed it?" she asked in her stout and comfortable voice, "that a

person could purposely lose himself in London and not be discovered for twenty years! Too wonderful, isn't it?"

Mrs. Cowle had been speaking to McMorris, whom his aunt had just presented, and she turned to the stout lady's words, and said with unexpected violence:

"Oh, impossible!"

There was an instant's silence in the little group. Then the talk turned to other matters, but Mrs. Cowle seemed suddenly to realise her own vehemence and she said to George McMorris:

"Of course I am not an authority, but I should have thought it quite impossible."

"Then you are a Londoner," he suggested with more sarcasm than the occasion seemed to demand.

"Do you mean because I know so little about London? Oh, you are quite mistaken for I really know a great deal."

"Then you are certainly not a Londoner."

Frances laughed.

"In moments of extreme vanity I have fondly hoped I was a cosmopolitan," she said.

"Why do English people born abroad always flatter themselves they are that?"

Mrs. Cowle cast a quick look at her hostess' nephew.

"My dear Mr. Standish," she said, and it is to be feared from the faintly malicious look in her eyes that the confusion in the name was less a matter of accident than intention, "your interest in my birthplace is really very kind, but I do hope you are not extracting information for any horrible newspaper purpose."

"Good lord," thought McMorris, "the woman simply shrieks for advertisement." However he denied the soft impeachment, adding guilelessly and as though to make polite conversation: "You must have been hung up by the traffic rather a long time this afternoon. I saw you about half-an-hour ago only a few hundred yards away from here. As our ample friend observed, something ought to be done about it."

If this were a challenge she ignored it and after a moment he added:

"But now I remember, I heard you tell your man to drive back."

The accident of many a human relationship is here exemplified for if Frances Cowle had chosen to explain the real and simple facts of the case—that she had turned back for sheer pleasure in the windy hour—she would have made a friend for life. It is not surprising perhaps that she did nothing of the kind, for she had found little enough in this rather impertinent young man to call for any such confidence. So she merely said: "Indeed?" and this retort, while it did not crush McMorris in the least, did effectually register him adversary to a woman he had hitherto regarded with impersonal admiration. It had been pose, he decided, mere pose from beginning to end.

At this moment Penelope Crozier obtruded herself into the conversation, strategically bringing Mrs. Cowle another cup of tea.

"You will let me talk to you, won't you?" she said intensely, "because I've been worrying my aunt to let me meet you ever since I came back from Australia."

McMorris in his cynical new view of the celebrity, watched to see her drink in this somewhat gushing hero-worship with avidity, but was disappointed. A little flame of colour hung in her cheeks for a moment and she clasped and unclasped a restless hand upon the arm of her chair, as she said, in a voice that threatened to freeze at any moment:—

"Really? But why Australia? I hardly see the connection."

"Oh there isn't any of course," said Penelope eagerly, "except that it was there I read your books. You see my friends, the Archers, of whom I saw a great deal, were tremendous admirers of yours and—and they taught me to appreciate them."

The girl was floundering a little but it was not ungracefully said and even McMorris admitted to himself

that her reverential air was flattering enough, but still Mrs. Cowle's voice had a queer edge to it and the colour played in her cheeks.

"Dear me! How quaint," she said, "I had no idea my books penetrated to such outlandish places. And these Archers, what are they? A native regiment or something of that kind?"

"Oh no, they don't have native regiments in Australia," instructed Penelope hastily, "Archer was the name of the people we stayed with in Adelaide. I went out with my father on a scientific congress and they entertained us. Mr. Archer is the Attorney-General and a very brilliant man, and Mrs. Archer is a perfect dear."

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Cowle again, but she seemed no longer interested and a moment later rose and moved away.

Penelope looked disappointed, and in her extremity even appealed to McMorris.

"You'd hardly think a clever woman like that would be so ignorant about Australia or anywhere else, would you?" she said.

"She wasn't," said McMorris tersely.

II

But if this were an inspiration on his part it went no further than that, and neither to him nor to the other onlookers had there been anything the least momentous in the frail threads of conversation that afternoon, so that if they took no significance for Mrs. Cowle going home it must have been due to her own temperament or her own greater knowledge.

As a matter of fact she had gone away as soon as she was decently able, and now glad of the cool air and the darkness, lay back in the car, her face white and very weary, and her heart thumping unpleasantly. The wind had fallen and a thousand lights ran past her in the mists until she might have been slipping through a twilight of pale gold. The shining roads of London and

romance spread out before her, and, as the car climbed Constitutional Hill towards Grosvenor Place, a line of motor buses like a golden cavalcade swung by, and then dark and secret, a string of taxis, hurrying away into the enfolding night. But against these soothing influences Frances Cowle had closed her eyes for once. She was a woman who, having managed the larger aspects of her own destiny with extraordinary decision and singleness of purpose, now found small worries crowding to her on all sorts of matters that were not really important in the least. She worried about being dreadfully punctual for appointments and was therefore always kept waiting by a less scrupulous world, and worried by that. She lived in a perpetual hurry to keep faith with people who never expected such exactitude and was harassed by a certainty that she would always be tired out when by any chance she wanted to be at her best.

The tones of her own voice, of other people's voices, chance words that might seem to have a double meaning, these things had a malignant habit of returning upon her and holding her mind at tension, and to-day especially they had been like fingers pointing to her in a crowd. She knew it was ridiculous to suppose there had been any hidden significance in the chance conversations of the afternoon, yet they had shaken her more than once and she was desperately afraid she had betrayed the fact. There had been the talk of the man who lost himself in London, then George McMorris' questions about her birthplace only made significant by his peculiar manner. Penelope's contribution had been the worst of all. Harmless Penelope needless to say was dreadfully innocent of any such intention, and yet by one of those weird chances that beset our fortunes, in the casual mention of her friends the Archers, she had obtruded the one name Frances Cowle was always looking for and did not wish to hear.

Out of the glare of Knightsbridge the car slipped into a quiet road where the houses stood shoulder to shoulder in decorous agreement, to each one its trim-

looking window boxes, its carefully closed blinds. Then they were at 19 Lavender Gardens, and an open doorway, framing oak staircase and panelled walls, welcomed its returning mistress.

This little house, so full of lovely, unobtrusive things, and index, not only to material prosperity but to a high and fastidious taste, was necessarily a haven to Frances Cowle whose pleasures and delights had been for many years those of the mind untouched by human affairs, or indeed any affairs but her own. And now as she came into its friendly shelter she found the afternoon's depressions slipping from her; evil dreams she told herself from a world she did not care about.

In the study she found her secretary, with hat on and rather nervous as usual, waiting to go home, and she spoke a few words to her with some impatience, then nodded dismissal, sitting down to her lettters and papers with a sigh of relief at last. This room was at the back of the house and looked out above a little balcony upon a long vista of trees now only traceable in the misty darkness by the swish of their fallen leaves on the paths below. For to live in "Gardens" has this advantage over a square, that you really have a garden —even though it may be common to other people too— at your door instead of having to find a key and go out and cross the road to reach it, things utterly absurd to contemplate in the hurry of modern days.

Among her letters Frances found a copy of *The British Australasian*, which for reasons of her own came to the house among other periodicals every week, although it was rarely opened. To-night however, with the monstrous accident of Penelope's words in mind, she tore off the wrapper and stood up, the paper in her hand, as though undecided whether to look at it or not. At the same moment she raised her head and saw something that left her, lips parted, trembling, startled and almost ready to cry out.

For some reason the curtains had not been drawn, and with the darkness behind it and the light within the window had given back her own reflection, that was

all, and in a second she realised this. But dimly outlined so, it had seemed a girl's face and a girl's figure looking back at her, the picture of her own youth with all its high hopes and great enthusiasms and final desolation. She sat down at the table, covering her face with shaking hands, and all her life swung back to that old time with a kind of vivid pain and longing and sudden loneliness. Then out of this there came a swift decision, and she took up the paper scanning its pages with eager eyes. At first she did not find the name she sought there, and by and by she smiled at herself a little scornfully for supposing that she would. The next moment a cable caught her glance and this is what she read.

Adelaide, November 7th.

The State elections have resulted in an overwhelming triumph for the Labour Party. In the City labour gained three seats out of a possible four, among the defeated candidates being William Archer who has been Attorney-General in successive Ministries since 1906.

Mrs. Cowle reading this laughed suddenly and threw the paper in the fire.

CHAPTER II

THE ENGLISH MAIL

" Fair islands of the silver fleece,
Hoards of unsunned, uncounted gold,
Whose havens are the haunts of peace,
Whose boys are in our quarrel bold;
Our bolt is shot, our tale is told,
Our ship of state in storms may toss,
But ye are young if we are old,
Ye Islands of the Southern Cross."

Andrew Lang.

I

FIVE days earlier on the other side of the world, Julien Archer, daughter of the outgoing Attorney-General (although at the time she did not know he was outgoing), sat on the wide stone balustrade of the Town Hall balcony, looking down on the exciting drama of election night.

It was early summer in the little square, white city of Adelaide, and every car that came trailing in with yellow eyes and a clamour of gongs from the suburbs, added its hurrying quota to the crowds in the streets. Everyone was in town to-night to see the results posted, or to see each other, it didn't much matter, for in a country where most nights of the year are star-lit, silver-blue and glorious, the spirit of holiday is a national possession to be pandered to upon the least occasion.

Men and women, girls and boys of every class and creed, elbowed each other in the throng. There were politicians waiting to hear their fate proclaimed, and often their women-folk beside them, confidently smiling upon a world that was not deceived for a moment. There were working men with gaunt and earnest faces and working women arrayed in the fine feathers of their kind. There were undergraduates looking for larks and

finding them, and parties of young roughs with similar ambitions, and only debarred from partnership by accent, which is the one real class-distinction after all. And everywhere people laughed and chaffed each other, exchanging friendly greetings or terse political incivilities as they passed.

But about the Town Hall and down Grenfell Street the crowds were both dense and stationary, for on the walls of the newspaper offices, under a flare of lights, they were posting the election figures as the counts came in from the various polling booths.

The names of the candidates, arranged in districts, were initialled according to their party, that is to say, Liberal, Labour, or Independent, the last being of little importance and less interest as a general thing. The real fight, and it was an increasingly bitter one, was between the Liberals and Labour men, and as one side or another gained the advantage for a moment, the crowd cheered or protested, passing the news excitedly down the street.

The girl who sat in her white dress high above, looking out upon it all, was filled by every sound of the people with a new exhilaration that had little to do with mere party triumphs or defeats. It was her first election, the first since she had reached the age of votes and citizen responsibility, and for months she had been in the thick of it all, working towards this event, acting as unofficial secretary to her father, organising women's committees, canvassing weeks on end. She had no doubt what the result would be and she thought with a kind of vivid excitement that this was living history, the fine, vigorous history of a new and splendid land. She looked down the wide street, the widest in the world she remembered with a little thrill, with its crowded restaurant balconies, its gleam of golden lights and its square white buildings, standing against the blue and silver of the clear night sky. She turned her gaze in the other direction to the massed green of the square beyond the post office and to the tower where a single light blinked at her like a friendly eye.

"Why, the English mail is in," she thought, and was glad of it. Even that seemed to add to the drama of the moment.

II

Julien had driven into town with her father directly after dinner, declining her step-mother's unromantic suggestion that she should stay at home in the cool instead and hear the results by telephone.

"Darling, how can you?" she said reproachfully, "as though we could hear them cheering the pater by telephone, or see the other side tearing its hair and gnashing its teeth. And what's the good of having another side if you can't have the satisfaction of gloating over it once in a while?"

Mrs. Archer smiled at her, a sudden warmth in her eyes, and behind that a faint look of anxiety which Julien did not see.

"Sometimes it is the other side that gloats," she suggested drily, and Jessie, the school-girl sister, added:

"I don't know what you and father see in politics, a lot of silly men being rude to each other about things that nobody really cares tuppence about. If I were the Governor-General or the King, or someone, I'd stop it, and I'm sure we mightn't have any father for all we've seen of him lately."

"You've seen a sight more of him than I have anyway," said Tom, the fifteen year old military cadet, morosely, "I can tell you I was pretty keen on the Pater's seeing that last parade while the Commandant was here too. He put us through some jolly stiff manœuvres."

"Sorry to neglect the army, old man," apologised his father, and at this little sally Julien gurgled her delighted admiration, adding: "They're shocking vandals aren't they—all of them, father? But never mind, come into town with me and we'll both of us cheer you like mad."

So, while the vandals stayed lazily at home on the

wide verandah, Julien drove off to town with her father, that debonair, delightful father whose image was mirrored in her own charming youth, who had given her besides her ready confidence and her even more ready laughter. Yet there was another strain in Julien too, dimly outlined yet, but surely stirring, the strain of a clear spirit and a very high enthusiasm; and perhaps to-night she was vaguely conscious of it, for she lay back in the motor looking quietly at her father, and suddenly she thought: "They are not like us those others," aware as she had rarely been before of the alien blood between them. Then that thought took on the aspect of treachery to her stepmother and the children, and this was so very far from her nature that she said to her father impulsively:

"I think mother is quite as frightfully keen about the election as we are if she'd only admit it. I believe it's all nonsense, you know."

"My dear infant," said her father, "what does it matter? There's no real occasion for women to worry their heads about politics after all."

"Father, you villain! If you talk like that I shall go away to England and learn to smash windows and throw bombs."

"That would be abominable," declared her father unblushingly.

When they reached King William Street the crowds were so dense that they decided to leave the car at a garage and walk, and soon they were in the thick of the throng, and people were hailing them with friendly voices or cheering or laughing a little as they went by. To Julien even the laughter seemed affectionate, and she said to herself with a little thrill of delight and pride:

"How splendid it is that they like him so."

By and by they met the Premier, Mr. Curtis, and some more of her father's colleagues, and it was clear to Julien that while they talked to her like a comrade they could very well do without her.

"Oh do take father away, Mr. Curtis," she begged. "You've no idea what a responsibility he is. That's

the worst of having such a disgracefully young and good-looking parent. Everybody thinks you're engaged to him and it is so embarrassing."

"My dear young person, do you really imagine I shall let you wander about at your own sweet will in a crowd like this?" expostulated Mr. Archer.

"Oh father dear, nonsense! As if I were not years older than you. Besides I shan't wander. I'll go home by tram when I feel like it, and in the meantime I'm going to watch the fun from the Town Hall balcony."

"The devil you are! Who said so?"

"I did. Doesn't the Town Hall belong to the citizens, meaning us? Please Mr. Curtis take him away quickly and don't let him waste any more of my valuable time."

So they took him laughing, and Julien ran up the Town Hall steps, where of course she had no earthly right to be, except the right of her youth and its supreme self-confidence, the kind of youth that moves the world, the kind of self-confidence that moves it to our own purposes. In the Town Hall the scrutineers were busy, and an attendant exclaimed as she passed: "Too late, Miss! The polling booth is closed." But Julien merely smiled at him in her friendly way and said, "That's quite all right, thank you, I've already voted." After which she was allowed to pass unchallenged, though with some surprise.

And now on the balcony with its long expanse of dusty gloom and rows of piled up chairs, she sat looking down on the pageant of the moment, clear-eyed, confident, wonderfully alive, and embodying in her own frank, vigorous girlhood, the spirit of the young land.

Her father's name was not yet leading but she thought she knew too much about elections to be alarmed by that. It merely meant of course that the boxes were not opened from the wards that held his chief supporters, and while she waited for his final triumph, she was quite content to rejoice at other people's.

Suddenly the balcony was invaded by two young men and a girl, who bore down upon her with a little whirlwind of laughter.

" Jove, I thought we were had that time," exclaimed Dick Curtis, climbing the balustrade beside her. " Julien, you wily old bird, how did you manage to sneak past the authorities? Your governor told us you were here, but some wretched minion at the door tried to argue about it. We bolted and left him to fling his words of wisdom to the four winds, or I daresay it was five."

" Oh Olive, do pull him down," requested Julien. " I know he'll fall over and it's dreadfully unlucky to fall off a balcony on Saturday."

Olive, who was an athletic-looking young woman with rather wild red hair, promptly pulled him and was kicked for her trouble, a little favour she received without protest.

" You come down first and then he'll follow you, because people always do follow you as the night the day," she said. " Besides we're all simply pining for ices, and Harry is going to ' shout.' "

Julien chuckled.

" Oh I don't believe he could," she protested, and Harry glowered at her short-sightedly through his spectacles and said:

" What's it to do with you? "

" Harry, if you're rude to the pretty lady I shall throw you to the lions," declared Olive. " I know they're lions by the way they roar. There they go again. Now be a sport and bet Julien it's more votes for your pater and none for hers."

She came to the balustrade and looked over, her arm round the resisting Harry's neck, and lest this should appear alarming it should be added that Olive was married to the Premier's eldest son, though no one quite knew how it had come about. Olive was a Melbourne girl and Harry had suddenly married her during a holiday in Victoria. Since none of his familiars had ever seen him speak two words to a girl if he could help it, it was instantly divined that this large, red-headed girl, with the impertinent nose, had married him off while he was more than usually absent-minded.

Then it came out that Olive had a good deal of money in her own right, and Harry's dearest friends told each other they had always known he was a good deal more wideawake than anybody else suspected.

"There," said Olive, "that's Waroora they're putting up. Julien Archer, for goodness' sake come along down, unless you intend to sit up there for ever like St. Simon Thingamy. Hullo, here come the city results after all. Now perhaps you'll be satisfied."

There was a sudden breathless silence in the little group, but down in the street the crowd seemed to have gone mad, and their excited cheering brought a sudden dimness to Julien's eyes and a swift pain to her throat. Then a low whistle from Dick Curtis jerked her back to earth, and she leant forward to look at the figures that seemed to dance a devil dance before her.

"Why, it says Finals, and father—oh, it can't be true," she cried. "Of course it isn't . . . What nonsense! . . . The North Adelaide and Walkerville boxes wouldn't be opened yet. Dick, it can't possibly be the finals yet, can it? . . . Why, it's preposterous . . . Do look, there's an angel, and see what you make it out to be?"

"I say, you know, I'm afraid it looks jolly like it," said young Curtis. "All this row . . . It's these beastly labour fellows. They've got three men in."

"Oh, *no!*"

Julien's tone was violently protesting, and a flame of anger lit her grey eyes, an anger that was directed, not so much against the thing itself which she could neither believe nor admit, but against the stupidity of the young man who so evidently did both.

"Oh, I daresay it's all a mistake," said Olive cheerfully, and somehow this imbecile remark brought a conviction to Julien which all the facts and figures had been unable to do, and she looked at her three friends and burst out laughing.

"How p—perfectly ridiculous," she said. "Why, father's always got in for years and years and years, and

I never dreamed he could possibly do anything else. Did you? Did Mr. Curtis? I say, tell me honestly."

"Oh well," said Dick, avoiding her eyes, "you've always got to be prepared, you know. I'm never certain of my own pater, let alone anybody else's."

Julien jumped down.

"I'll have to go home and break the horrid news to the family," she said, "so I don't think I'll wait for Harry's ices after all. You don't mind, do you?"

And they said that they were deeply offended as befitted the occasion, and went with her into the streets below, where the cheering people seemed suddenly to have taken on for her a thousand eyes of triumph and derision.

A long time after it seemed to her, her tram came by, one of the toast-rack kind with its sides fully open to the summer weather, and slowly she found herself moving down the street, on both sides the crowds so near that she could have put out her hand and touched them as she passed.

A feeling of personal responsibility weighed upon the girl, and the defeat of her father hurt her the more because it had been so little guessed at, and so utterly unforeseen. She did not think of it as an irreparable loss to her country or fling her impotent blame on the other side. To a smaller mind these things would have struck the inevitable note of consolation, but Julien only knew that she and the rest of them should have moved worlds if necessary, to get her father in, and they coolly hadn't done it, and now it was too late. There were so many things they might have done. She began to think them over swiftly and certainly as the tram slid Northwards over the little river, round some winding roads and into a suburb full of garden scents.

The Archers' house at Medindie was of the wide-spreading, bungalow variety indigenous to Australia, with generous verandahs enclosed in parts by thick, clustering grape vines already heavy with green fruit. Its gardens ran from it down the slope with a riot of flowers, and archways, rose and fern-covered and thick,

tall fruit trees flanking them beyond. The loquats were already golden there, and presently there would be peaches in profusion, and apricots and figs, and oranges, and flaming pomegranates in their due succession. To-night a hose was running somewhere and the scent of the warm earth, refreshed and grateful, met Julien like a tangible thing. But this merely physical sensation of pleasure left her almost immediately, and she ran swiftly up the path to the verandah, where she could see her stepmother reading under the electric light.

"He hasn't got in . . . father's out . . . they've defeated him," she said, her words tumbling over each other and her tone a little wild.

"I rang up half-an-hour ago and heard," said Mrs. Archer, putting down her book and holding out her hand to the girl. "It can't be helped, dear."

"But it could have been," declared Julien indignantly "and—and you don't seem a bit surprised . . . the Curtises weren't either . . . nobody was except me."

"My dear child, I am much too old to be surprised at anything, and you mustn't blame me because it is my misfortune. What have you done with your father?"

"Left him with Mr. Curtis. Mother, it's no good. I simply can't believe it. Why, he's so popular, you should just have heard the people as we went down the street. Besides there have been Archers in Parliament for ages and ages."

"All the more reason they should stand aside and give someone else a chance," suggested her stepmother lightly, "variety is always charming you know." She still held Julien's hand and smiled at her to hide a secret sympathy and concern for her disappointed ardour. "Personally I'm rather glad," she said, "because it will be so nice to feel I have a husband again instead of an occasional male visitor."

And Julien protested, hugging her impulsively: "Oh, darling, you laugh at everything."

The chuff chuff of a motor reached them a moment

later and then Mr. Archer drove up, jumping down from the car with a whistle of apparent unconcern.

"Heard the horrid news of course?" he said cheerfully.

Julien ran to him and put a pair of comforting, strong arms around his neck.

"It's a hateful shame and I can't believe it. I simply can't," she said.

But Mr. Archer would not admit that he was in need of comfort, and because the very offer of it took on the aspect of criticism he grew suddenly irritable and threw himself into a chair.

"What can we do?" he exclaimed like a peevish child. "Now these Labour fellows have got the upper hand we might as well spare ourselves the empty trouble of remonstrance. The unfortunate country is going to the dogs . . . . the fools are driving capital away as sure as I'm sitting on my own verandah. It won't be my own much longer with men like Broadbent and Thornton running the show. I'm not sure it isn't a compliment to be rejected from such rabble after all."

Swift humour touched Mrs. Archer's face for a second and Julien caught the flash of it with a sudden understanding that was new and rather terrible. She had heard all these old platitudes from her father during the past year, had copied them conscientiously in many a speech for him, but now they touched her with a kind of ignominy because she saw with her clear mind their essential impotence. Her father did not accept defeat with high and smiling courage. He did not even protest against it, but wore it as a virtue that mocked at the villainies of the other side. In the wake of this realisation Julien saw very clearly several incidents the night had brought her, the laughter of the people, Dick Curtis' evident embarrassment, and lastly her mother's attitude, with all its hint of hidden knowledge. In the sudden pitiless illumination she seemed to see her father clearly for the first time and to know that even if the country did go to the dogs a

thousand times, he had never been the man to stay it or even help it either way.

She said no more about the election but left her father and mother talking, and went listlessly indoors. There were some letters for her in the hall—one she saw had come by the English mail—and she carried them into the library to read, without very much interest, and still vaguely conscious of the murmur of talk outside. But presently this ceased and her mother came in, seating herself on the arm of her chair and enquiring:

"Any news, my darling?"

"The English one is from Penelope, of course," said Julien looking up "and did you ever, they want me to go and stay with them in London."

Mrs. Archer smiled down at her, a steady smile, and said:

"Well now that your father can spare you I'm not sure it wouldn't be the very best thing in the world."

Julien did not answer this or even seem to consider it at the moment. She put her arm round her mother and exclaimed with tragic impetuosity:

"Father doesn't really *care* about the election. He doesn't care a bit."

"Lucky father," said Mrs. Archer, smiling, and although she said no more than that to Julien it was an illuminating confidence.

CHAPTER III

THE MOTHER OF JULIEN

" O the world is wondrous fair
When the tide of life's at flood,
There is magic in the air,
There is music in the blood;
And a glamour draws us on
To the distance rainbow-spanned,
And the road we tread upon
Is the road to Fairyland."

V. J. Daley.

I

THERE was no more talk of the election in the Archer household, but if this conspiracy of silence were designed to spare the feelings of the defeated candidate, it soon became clear that it was unnecessary. Mr. Archer had never been more his debonair, delightful self. He exulted loudly over his increased leisure, made facetious and entertaining remarks about his successor in office, and was everywhere the life and soul of the company.

Julien watched him with a still wonder even while she laughed affectionately at his fooling as of old. His insensibility to the real issues touched her with a secret shame, and night after night she lay awake staring into the darkness, cheeks burning, her young mind sitting in judgment upon her affections. All her life she had been immeasurably proud of her father. She had a natural love of power and it had seemed to her a fine thing that he had so long been chosen for high office and service to the State. Now in this sudden awakening it is quite possible this glorified office suffered quite as much as the individual in the merciless judgment of youth. For the first time she had a glimpse of that machinery which permits itself to wink at weakness and incompetence for the sake of personal or party

benefits. She felt stirred to some great protest, even while she knew her own impotence to make it, and above all she had a sense of personal meanness that she had been able, even secretly, to criticise her own father.

Perhaps her stepmother realised to some extent at least the tumult of spirit through which the girl was passing, for she set herself resolutely to make the suggested trip to England an accomplished fact.

There had always been the warmest confidence between these two. Indeed the relation was a very perfect one, so much so that Julien, who had lost her own mother in early infancy, had never realised that loss. Verbally she had learnt it directly she was old enough to understand the situation, her stepmother forseeing the shock of such an announcement from any outside source, and knowing a world that is always ready to take on the sensational mantle of the informer. The wisdom of this step was undeniable. The position robbed of the mystery "friendly hints" would have given it, appeared quite normal to the child, and the relation of mother and daughter remained unchanged except perhaps by an added devotion from Julien, whose nature was early capable of appreciating the finer shades of a situation and the very lavish fulfilment of her own slender claims. At the same time Mrs. Archer would have been the first to deny any deliberate virtue in her affection for this child. She was quite incapable of jealousy of her predecessor, although she could and did feel tremendous curiosity about her. This had the fuller play because she had never seen the first Mrs. Archer, and was not the kind of woman to seek information from the host of interested acquaintances who would have been eager enough to give it. Her chief informant therefore had been her mother-in-law, that resolute lady who had managed her son and her son's household, his wives notwithstanding, up to the hour of her death, which providentially occurred only twelve months after his second marriage.

"Elizabeth was a perfect fool, my dear," the elder Mrs. Archer had told her new daughter-in-law with

decision, "there was no other name for her, and between you and me I have always felt it was an extremely wise act of Providence to remove her. I have no patience with these modern young women with their nerves, and temperaments, and all the rest of the claptrap. Of course I know poor William will tell you she had such intellect, but what business has any woman with intellect I should like to know if she can't look after her home and children? Elizabeth had about as much sense as a babe unborn when it came to a woman's natural duties. And I can assure you that child might just as well have had no mother at all. Then before the baby was properly out of the cradle she must needs get restless, and the doctor, young of course, Elizabeth was quite a good-looking person in her way, said it was nerves, and she must go abroad for a thorough change. Nerves forsooth! Lunacy more likely. I always said she wanted locking up."

If the second Mrs. Archer, at that time little more than a girl herself, listened to this graphic description of her predecessor in respectful silence, it must be admitted that it only served to increase her interest in, and sympathy for, the deceased Elizabeth. She herself found the determined domination of her mother-in-law irksome enough and she could easily see that to a highly strung and brilliant girl there were several aspects of that household that would be intolerable. There was another stumbling block. She herself was one of those eminently maternal women whose affections are without excitement, and although she adored her husband, it was even at that time, rather as one adores a delightful child. By the same token she never by any chance took him seriously. Had this other woman done so perhaps and found herself reaping an intolerable disillusionment? She began to think it likely. Altogether the thing took on for her the aspect of a tragic and rather romantic little story, the index to which she seemed to find in the child Elizabeth had left behind her. It is not surprising therefore that Julien's development became a subject of absorbing interest

to the second Mrs. Archer. Her own children, devoted as she was to them, never could have this fascinating element of surprise for her because she knew the stock they came from. Julien represented the unknown quantity. And so the girl, who might have suffered unthinkably in harsher hands, throve and grew up to a heritage of affectionate understanding instead.

II

Mrs. Archer approached the subject of Julien's holiday in England with some caution, for her predecessor had died abroad and she foresaw that it might easily awaken painful memories. Of course it did nothing of the kind.

"Good lord!" expostulated Julien's father, "why not choose the North Pole at once? We can't spare her all that time surely? Let her run over to Sydney if she wants a holiday."

"Of course we don't want to spare her," said Mrs. Archer, "and of course we mustn't be selfish. I don't think you quite realise how you've worked Julien this last year, and after all she's only a girl. She should be having a good time, and a year abroad would do her a world of good. It's natural that she should feel a little lost now with nothing to do."

"By Jove, I never thought of that," said Mr. Archer, who did not know that this statement was as characteristic as it was superfluous. "Very well, let her go by all means if she has set her heart upon it. Only tell me how much it's going to cost so that we shan't all be bankrupt. By the way . . . there's a little money of—of her mother's I always intended Julien to have. It's only a few hundred pounds, and she might have some of it now. I daresay a girl can spend a good deal of pocket-money in London."

Mrs. Archer smiled at him and patted his arm affectionately. On the rare occasions when he mentioned his first wife, it was always with this rather diffident air and she liked it in him.

"I'm glad you kept that for Julien. I must talk to her about it," she said.

"All the same, dear, your father and I are giving you this trip remember," she told the girl later, "and I don't think you should spend your mother's money like that. It seems to me it ought to be kept for a more important occasion. You will marry some day perhaps."

"I wonder if I shall?" said Julien pensively. Clearly at that moment marriage seemed an extremely dull proceeding beside the more glorious prospect of the trip to Europe, and she did not pursue it very far. After a moment she added, a little awkwardly:

"Didn't she die in England, dearest?"

"No, in France, I believe," said Mrs. Archer, "poor little soul." She looked across at Julien who was sitting at the writing-table, and at sight of the graceful, vivid young figure that old story seemed suddenly alive before her. "You should get your father to tell you all about her, my darling," she said, "for I know so absurdly little. I suppose the position is always a little awkward for the second wife. I only know that she was taken ill when you were still a baby. It was a nervous breakdown, and the doctor ordered her right away at once, and you were left in your grandmother's charge. Then when your mother was staying in some little French village she was taken ill with pneumonia and died."

"Poor girl," exclaimed Julien with impersonal pity, "and didn't you ever see her?—not even once?"

"Never. I lived so far away you see, besides I didn't even know your father at that time. I wish I had seen her for your sake. I used to wish it for my own."

"Did you really?" The girl swung round in her chair and leant her arms on the back of it. "Don't you think she must have been rather nice?" she said, "I often wonder what she was like."

"I used to wonder too," admitted Mrs. Archer, smiling, "but, it's queer, isn't it? since her daughter has grown up I think I know."

Julien laughed and across the room their eyes met with affectionate understanding.

" Oh in that case she wouldn't have liked you a bit," the girl declared fervently. " She would have thought you a perfect cat."

" Well, as long as she thought me perfect, darling—"

" People generally tell me I am exactly like father," Julien protested soberly a minute later, " and I thought so too until—until quite lately. I don't believe I am like him. I'm glad you don't think so either, mother."

" You are like him in looks but not very much else," agreed Mrs. Archer, " but I must find out if he hasn't a picture of your mother to give you. I've never seen one, but your poor dear father is so funny. I'm sure he never likes to mention Elizabeth to me in case I should be seized with violent spasms of green-eyed jealousy. It's a popular masculine delusion that our sex cannot help that kind of thing."

" I suppose it is rather awkward for father," said Julien slowly, " and I daresay he didn't keep her picture when he married you, but you'd think my grandmother would at least."

" Oh, would you ? " enquired Mrs. Archer, " I can hear her saying : ' put that rubbish behind the fire.' Your grandmother always put things behind the fire. It was one of her curious little ways."

" Didn't she like my—my mother then ? " enquired Julien, who always found the name very hard to say in that connection.

Mrs. Archer's reply was brief but eloquent.

" My dear, your grandmother was a tartar," she said.

The photograph when eventually found was old and faded, and unilluminating, and Julien and her step-mother privately agreed it could not be worthy of the unknown Elizabeth, so it was put away again. Between them they had fashioned an imaginary and of course erroneous picture of the girl who twenty years ago had found all her high enthusiasms broken under the dominion of the elder Mrs. Archer, and that charming but ineffectual man, her son.

III

Meanwhile summer was keeping a burning eye upon the little city, and all day the girls' hats flung white pennants of chiffon to a wind that barely stirred them, and of nights the sea-going trams and trains were crowded. Of nights too, an occasional long thin tongue of flame lit like a beacon, the far edge of the ranges, and when a gully wind blew over the town it brought with it the same story of adventure, bush fires and the beaters out, and over all the subtle, elusive fragrance of the burning gums. Towards Christmas the Archers moved with the rest of the world, seeking cooler places to their summer cottage in the hills, and here they slept out camp fashion under the scattered stars, and awoke to crimson dawns in the bush, with the magpies singing their song of rippling water in the high white gums around them. Julien always loved these summer months. The wonderful, clear air of her country with its scent that is like nothing else in the wide world, set the blood singing in her veins until all doubts and depressions were swept away. Besides the forthcoming trip to England was successfully absorbing her attention, and the days passed swiftly in fascinating preparations. Then there were shopping expeditions when the car carried her to town by winding, white hills, roads through aisles of trees with the panorama of the plains at the end of them, reaching out to the slim, silver semicircle of the sea; and as the months wore on there were the usual farewell visits and jollifications with choice spirits come to envy the traveller.

During this time news came to hand from Penelope of her meeting with the famous Mrs. Cowle, and that lady's regrettable ignorance of Australia, including of course the incident of the native regiment. Penelope discussed the celebrity with evident discontent, but the Archers, who remembered her as a very earnest young person, received her story with much hilarity, and came to the conclusion that she had probably been

guilty of instructing Mrs. Cowle. Yet Julien found the news exciting too. Actually to know the high gods as Penelope's aunt seemed to do, was to her an exhilarating prospect, and the romantic London of her imagination, hitherto untenanted, became peopled with Mrs. Cowles, Kiplings, Melbas, and the rest.

Julien was to sail in March by the "Orvieto," and the present plans included landing at Naples and going overland, through Italy. In England, as well as her visit to the Croziers, she had other friends to claim her, so that she expected to be away about a year. When the vintage is over and the apples are red on Australian hill-sides, when the first pale primroses lift their little heads in English woods, there begins the yearly exodus from the great young Continent over the seas; for every good Australian is born with the wander-lust, and to see the world—and come home again—is the first need that he knows. Julien Archer, being the spoilt daughter of indulgent parents, it would have been easy to find her a dozen willing chaperones, therefore, if Olive Curtis had not rushed in at the psychological moment to offer her services. Harry Curtis, who had just come through a more or less scintillating course at the University, was a civil engineer with a reputed uncanny genius for mechanics, and it appeared that the Orient Company had offered him a free passage to England and back for study purposes, after an obliging little habit that it had. Of course Olive was going too, in spite of the obvious extravagance of such a journey, and she pointed out to Julien that it would be a perfectly scandalous waste of good material if they travelled by different boats.

"Harry will be a father to you," she added as a final inducement, and when Julien burst out laughing at this delightful picture, she said calmly: "He's the nicest person I know, even if he is my own husband, and so exciting to live with. You never know what he is going to say next."

"Oh, as long as he does say something sometimes," Julien gurgled. "Why, I've known Harry since I was

three and I believe I have heard him say exactly sixteen words."

"He talks to me by the hour," exclaimed Olive with a sudden vehemence, "about dynamos and things. Oh Julien I don't believe he has ever had anyone to talk to before."

Julien, who had never liked Harry Curtis, felt herself suddenly stirred. She had wondered a good deal about these two, for the ugly duckling of the good-looking Curtis family, with his abrupt manners and extremely bad-tempered mouth, had seemed a curious mate for Olive, who since her marriage, had been diligently translating him to his life-long friends as a wit, and the most charming fellow in the world. His brains, however, were undoubted, and the girl who had a passionate admiration for any sort of achievement, exclaimed with sudden sympathy:

"Never mind, he shall talk to us both all the way to England and back."

"Julien, you're a brick of the deepest dye," said Olive, recklessly mixing her metaphors, "I shall make Harry invent you an airship or a mousetrap or something for your very own."

But although Mr. and Mrs. Archer were brought to consent that Julien should travel under the stern guardianship of the paternal Harry, it transpired that the young gentleman's wife did not see fit to inform him of the fact until the very moment of sailing on the "Orvieto."

The great liner, lying alongside the wharf at the Outer Harbour, was already athrob with life, her engines pulsing, her gangways up, the newest of her nine hundred passengers crowding the railings. The others, who had come on board at Melbourne, Sydney or Hobart, paced the decks in chattering couples, or lying in their deck chairs, surveyed the new comers with the hostile eyes of people who, having been already some days at sea, naturally consider themselves of superior calibre.

A foreign warship was in port to-day, and in honour

of some official visitor was flying a good deal of bunting, a pleasant splash of colour against blue sky and silver sea. Beyond, the little town smiled in the sunshine, with its ornate Tourist Bureau, its iron sheds, its half-grown trees, stretching to white sand-hills in the distance. Nearer, most important, and best of all was the great traveller of the ocean, only tethered to land by a hundred fluttering coloured streamers now. All along the wharf waited the friends of outgoing voyagers, and each one held a roll of ribbon, the end of which was in the hands of somebody on the deck above. Julien's hands were full of them and she sorted them with deft fingers, her eyes sparkling with excitement and a lovely colour playing in her cheeks.

"Oh Harry you haven't a single ribbon," she exclaimed suddenly looking up. "Give the poor boy some and don't be greedy, Olive. He could have some of mine, but no doubt he'd scorn the suggestion as they don't belong to his special friends."

"Haven't got any special friends," growled Harry. Then he seemed to realise her presence with consternation, having hitherto absently supposed she was there to see Olive off. "Here! what are you doing on board still?" he enquired roughly. "You'll be left if you don't look out. Can't you see the gangway's up. You'll be carried on to the West in a minute."

Julien chuckled delightedly.

"That was quite a long speech," she declared, "You're improving already. And of course I'll be carried to the West, you old silly, and even further when I'm coming to England with you and Olive."

"Rot," said Mr. Curtis rudely.

"No it isn't. It's sober fact. Do you mean to say Olive didn't tell you? And can't you see my loving family down on the wharf ready to wave its hanky and weep a farewell tear for me?"

"Of course he can't," interposed Olive, "as they don't happen to be dynamos or traction engines." And she tied a pink and blue ribbon round his neck, letting the ends fall gracefully over one ear.

While he made no protest at this hardly dignified treatment of his person, Harry glared from one to the other.

"Don't know what the game is, but I suppose you're trying to be funny, you two," he said.

Olive laughed, her red hair flying in the wind and the tail of her eye watching Julien a little anxiously.

"So sorry, your high-and-mightiness," she said, "but I didn't know the Orient Company had lent you the whole ship."

And Julien added to him with sudden indignation:

"You didn't really believe I'd let Olive go to London alone with a bad-tempered old bear, did you?"

"We're off," cried a hundred voices on every side of them, and Harry moved abruptly from the railing, pushing Olive into his place. But as he went away his eyes met Julien's for the fraction of a second, and it seemed to her they were relieved, even a little grateful. She smiled swiftly at Olive.

"I know what it is," she said, "he's taking that tone by way of being a father to me. You know you promised that he would."

The space was widening between the wharf and steamer, and little by little the ribbons were let out till they lay like a rainbow-coloured pathway high above the water. Julien looked over it with misty eyes and heard the friendly voices hailing her for the last time. They were all there, her father and stepmother, the children and a host of friends, and now as the ribbons were slowly straining and breaking around her, she began to watch her own handful with eager eyes.

"That one of yours is lasting a long time," said Olive when all the rest had gone. "Look Julien, it is your mother's."

And Julien laughed.

"It happens to be longer than the rest so of course it is lasting. I meant it to," she said.

CHAPTER IV

A CHARMING YOUNG CREATURE

" There's nothing in the world that's worth a fear."
W. B. Yeats.

I

EARLY in July, Mrs. Standish invaded Frances Cowle's stronghold one afternoon, determined upon remonstrance at a long neglect.

" You are working yourself to death as usual," she said with indignation, glaring at Mrs. Cowle through her rather large glasses, " and I hate extravagance. Now you needn't try to make any lame excuses, Frances, for I intend to carry you off to Fields with me tomorrow afternoon. We are going down for a week."

" Would it be considered a lame excuse if I said I had some work to finish ? " enquired Mrs. Cowle meekly.

" Most decidedly. You can finish it at Fields quite as well as in London."

" I almost believe I could."

Mrs. Standish, who had certainly not expected such capitulation, regarded her friend with critical eyes, and a curious sense of pity touched her as it had so often done before. She never quite understood this feeling of hers with regard to Frances Cowle, whom other people merely envied or admired, but she knew that as far as she was concerned, it had opened the gateway to one real friendship in a lifetime literally strewn with excellent imitations, and the fact that Frances herself believed the whole intimacy to be prompted by a third person did not disturb her in the least.

" I am thankful that you can see sense for once," she told her drily, " and I shall take care that you rest when the precious work is done. You lead a most unnatural life, Frances."

" I recognise the quotation marks of course, but what neither of you will ever understand is that it is really the only natural life for me."

" You are not very lavish to your friends."

" No, perhaps I am not." Mrs. Cowle who had been walking restlessly round the room, stopped and looked down at her, her rather hard face relaxed a little, her eyes curiously alight. There was always something determined and compelling in Frances Cowle's eyes, which were large and dark, and set apart in a wide forehead under level brows, but sometimes they had also this luminous disarming quality of youth in them, that gave a kind of grace to the whole expression.

" The fact is," she said, " I ought not to have any friends. I'm one of those limited people who have no room in their lives for more than one—enthusiasm. When I begin to care about people my work suffers. Look at my last book."

" My dear, I haven't."

Frances laughed.

" Of course you haven't," she said, " and at least I don't want you to feel *that* a duty. It would be too horrible, but you know what I mean. The book was a set back and that is not a comforting reflection. What was it one amiable critic called it ? . . . a mass of intolerable poses."

" Critic ? " Mrs. Standish was plainly scornful, " My good for nothing nephew, George McMorris," she exclaimed, " and perhaps you'll tell me what he knows about it ? Nothing whatever. He is simply trying to turn a dishonest penny by sneaking into a profession that doesn't belong to him."

" What is his profession ? " enquired Frances amused. " It struck me he was quite an able writer."

" Oh ! he has been called to the bar of course. They all are, and a pretty bar it proves to most of them. As for George, I've given him permission to come down to Fields to-morrow, but I'll cancel the invitation if you like. He deserves it."

Mrs. Cowle burst out laughing.

"Poor George! Of course you mustn't," she declared, "it will amuse me to meet him again."

"I'm not sure that I want George to amuse you."

The two women looked at each other, faintly smiling, but whatever the challenge in the other's words, Frances refused to notice it.

"You're a bully," she said, "and somehow I always find that so stimulating and new. I have been bullying people for twenty years, but I have no real talent that way and I'm not an artist at it. None of my victims would believe it of course, but it's true. I loathe coercing people and I detest coercing the fates."

"You ought to know there are no such things as the fates," objected Mrs. Standish briskly, "only a lot of poor fools who live in deadly fear of each other, and a few rare souls who only fear themselves."

"I'm afraid I haven't met the rare souls."

"Of course not. You are far too busy writing realistic fiction to know anything about human nature. Besides it may be true that like calls to like, but it rarely gets an answer."

This little tribute deftly concealed in a tone of scornful indignation, brought a faint flush to Mrs. Cowle's cheek. She had at least that element of greatness in her that betrays itself in an absolute simplicity of spirit, and although she had fought her way single-handed into the limelight she could never realise that she was there, so that praise took on for her a kind of terrifying irony; yet she knew that praise as genuine as this had rarely come her way and she hugged it to her with sudden wistfulness, even while she laughed and said:

"You are certainly very stimulating. You make me feel as if I had been standing on my head, and I'm sure that is good for one, though hardly edifying for the neighbours. Never mind, there won't be any neighbours at Fields. It isn't a party, is it?"

"Dear me, no, thank goodness, merely one or two young people Ida rashly invited. Oh yes, and my serious niece, Penelope, and her Australian friend who

rejoices in the fantastic name of Julien. You'll like Julien Archer. She's a charming young creature."

"I think I detest charming people more than anybody on earth."

II

Frances hardly knew how she said it or why, except that her composure had been suddenly knocked flying and it was necessary to clutch at any straw to hide a tumult of mind she could not explain. She even managed by a supreme effort of will to continue the conversation without wildness until Mrs. Standish took her leave. Then she went to her room and violently locked the door as though to shut out the thoughts that were hammering at her brain.

She knew now that it would be impossible for her to go to Fields on Saturday, and she began to wonder what excuse would seem the most convincing. To be ill, of course, was out of the question for that would only bring Mrs. Standish and attendant reproaches. A press of work would be equally unavailing, nor had she any convenient relatives to call her out of town.

She walked about the room a line of worry about her eyes, and her gaze wandering vaguely from one object to another. At first she was not really conscious of anything but this need to put off her visit, and she had a moment of absurd fear that there was no excuse and she would be forced to go after all. It was one of her familiar terrors that she would not be able to meet some threatened situation, a terror none the less real because so utterly without either precedent or foundation.

She found herself at the window by and by, looking down into the Gardens now brilliant in their summer splendour. Far through the trees in the chequered shadow she could see the tennis courts and young men in flannels playing here and there. Then all at once there darted into view, slender and graceful, a girl in a white frock, and her heart began to thump uneasily and she found herself thinking in a kind of panic: "Perhaps

she will be like that," at last with some definite realisation of the news that all unwittingly her friend had brought her.

A sparrow flew out of a chestnut tree to dance a cake-walk on the balcony, and here and there an odd leaf fell to earth. Mrs. Cowle from her window watched these things with infinite attention and saw only a masterful old woman and a young man with grey eyes and the most charming smile in the world.

" I *detest* charming people," she said with suddenly clenched hands.

A long time after someone knocked softly at her door and she went to open it with hands that shook. It appeared that it was 7 o'clock and her secretary was waiting to go home.

" Then why doesn't she go ? " she asked the maid impatiently, " tell her to go home at once."

A quick, nervous footstep passed the door, and when it was safely gone she hurried to her study. A pile of work stood waiting on her desk, and somehow the room with all the familiar tools of her trade about it, steadied her nerves and made her smile a little. She took up some of the typescript and looked through it, but very soon she found that it was not making the slightest impression upon her mind. She tried a book, but that too was hopeless, and she got out notepaper and envelope to write to Mrs. Standish, and sat with them blank before her. Presently she thought : " but I can telephone her in the morning," and later, " I'll telegraph to Fields when it will be too late for her to find me out." By that time she had grown sorry for herself because the week at Fields had become desirable with its promise of friendly faces and cool, green country ways. What business had this girl to come here upsetting her plans ?

She had been far too long accustomed to think only of herself to consider the girl's side of that question. Besides any thought of the girl at all was one of the things she had always fiercely denied herself. That way only lay peace of mind. And now she had no

mental picture of her, except as of an alien presence infinitely annoying.

They told her presently that dinner was ready. She had forgotten to dress, and she went down as she was, sitting through the solitary meal with absent eyes, and eating very little. Dusk fell by and by and then she became aware that it was very hot indoors, and she opened the French window and went down the iron steps into the gardens. Here at least it was cooler and very quiet, for the tennis was over and the players had gone in to dinner. She wandered away among the tall old trees, with the wind in her face, and in a little while the peculiar heaviness of her mind lifted and she found pleasure as of old in the shape and sight of things, the patches of clear moonlight like pools among the shadows, and the yellow eyes of the houses looking out at her on every side.

A maid came out with a can and began to water a little flower-plot before one of the houses. The scent of the warm earth suddenly refreshed came to Mrs. Cowle as she passed and struck her with an odd sense of familiarity. It brought her mind whirling back to another garden she had known, and at once old memories, old hopes and fears were clamouring about her. For many years she had held these things in check with an iron will. There had been occasional reactions, of course—it was inevitable—but hitherto she had quickly conquered them. To-night she did not even try, and the luxury of that was so tremendous, that she felt with an immense astonishment the slow, hard tears in her eyes. And then came quite clearly at last the picture of Julien, not the Julien she remembered, but Julien, the little girl, Julien growing up. It would be hard to say what instinct stirred her then, not a maternal one surely, for long ago she had decided without any shadow of doubt that it had been left out of her composition. She did not even feel any particular emotion, only a still sense of excitement as she told herself that of course she would go to Fields to-morrow—Why not?—And see once and for all this girl some preposterous accident had brought her way.

CHAPTER V

THE MEETING

" And we met. You knew not me,
Mistress of your joys and fears:
Held my hand that held the key
Of the treasure of your years,
Of the fountain of your tears."

Alice Meynell.

I

GEORGE MCMORRIS went down to Fields next morning with Ida Standish, the tall, calm, fair-haired daughter of the house, who was thirty, and unmarried, and beautifully blind to the absurdity of such a combination. McMorris, who was always inclined to argue with her about this waste of opportunity, said:

" It's sheer indolence you know. Any able-bodied girl ought to have been able to catch a tame husband by this time, or what is the use of the higher education of woman? Besides, the whole position is untenable. There never has been an unmarried woman between the ages of thirty and forty, so it is perfectly evident it can't be done. I would marry you myself if I were not wedded to my art."

" I was sure your wife could not be really domesticated," murmured Ida with a reminiscent chuckle for her last raid on his bachelor chambers, " George dear, do you think if I sent her some really fetching dusters—"

"That," said Mr. McMorris with dignity, "is profane."

Fields was in Warwickshire, within easy distance of Stratford-on-Avon, but in spite of such an opportunity, it had no historic associations. The Standishes were inclined to boast that Queen Elizabeth had never spent a night there and that there was no possible evidence that Fields was known to the late Mr. Shakespeare—or the later Miss Corelli.

The house itself was a wide ivy-covered structure of no particular period, to which succeeding owners had added portions with a beautiful inconsequence, each to suit his own fancy. The result was chaotic and certainly not beautiful, but it gave the old house a spacious air that suited its character very well. There were few treasures indoors except an abounding comfort, for Mrs. Standish despised expensive bric-a-brac and considered Old Masters dingy. Yet the same uncompromising lady was not by any means the vandal she would have had you imagine, merely a thorough modern who did not believe in having to live up to her surroundings or make other people do so. At Fields you had and did exactly as you pleased, becoming as it were a member of the Honourable Company of the Doasyoulikes.

The gardens on the other hand, although comparatively small, were among the most beautiful in the county, for they had been laid out by some artist of another age, and preserved, goodness knows how, despite Victorian owners, their ancient dignity and beauty of design. Clipped yews and terraces with old, old balustrades were there, little walled rose gardens, and everywhere the green, thick turf stretching away to the tree-shadowed banks of the Avon. Beyond on every side lay the outspread fields, a vivid patchwork, stitched in summer time with the thread of scarlet poppies, of foxgloves and white marguerites.

Ida and George McMorris having lunched together, the former announced that she was going to interview the presiding household deities, so McMorris changed into his flannels and made for the river with a feeling of content. The young man had a secret passion for outdoor places, a passion which he even managed to gratify, while he lived and worked in London all the year round. Like most presentable and unattached young Englishmen he could have spent his entire leisure among country house parties, but that was another story. McMorris was far too well aware that nature study is the last object of such gatherings, aware

too of the adjectives that would qualify him in the eyes of mothers with daughters to dispose of, and so he kept his distance like the quarry who knows that the hunter is abroad. This was no insufferable vanity that made him overestimate his own charms, but a knowledge of economic values and a dislike to being lured into a situation. Such artificial barriers must impede romance in our undermanned modern England.

His aunt's little efforts for his disposal were less alarming, for they understood each other perfectly, and so as his boat carried him through the shadowy waters he reviewed with drowsy indifference the people Ida had told him they were expecting during the afternoon. There was Mrs. Cowle. Well she wouldn't trouble him much, thank goodness, and Arthur Standish, a bachelor brother of the house, pleasant but equally remote. There were a young couple into whose difficult love affair Ida and her mother were plunging a rash finger, guaranteed therefore to melt away at frequent intervals. And there were Penelope Crozier and some girl friend, each likely to be as dull and instructive as the other.

Perhaps the relationship between the three cousins, Ida Standish, Penelope Crozier and George McMorris, needs a brief explanation. George's mother had been like Mrs. Standish, a Crozier before her marriage, a sister to Penelope's father. These Croziers were people of enough wealth to lead a fairly amusing existence, and not enough importance to interfere with that pleasant state of affairs; and their father (himself a younger son who had made his fortune more by accident than intention) had upset everybody's calculations, and aimed a horrid blow at convention and precedence, by leaving his money equally between his three children. This was not from any advanced views on women's rights—or wrongs—but merely because he admired his daughters as thoroughly good sports, and thought his son a ninny, a fact which he did not trouble to conceal from that gentleman for a moment. In due course all three married, one sister to Robert Standish, who was

considered a thoroughly desirable match in every way, the other to a handsome young Scotchman of good family, with an estate as ancient as it was encumbered, and the brother to goodness-knows-whom. Neither sister was in the least disturbed by her new in-law's lack of antecedents, but her brother clearly thought she should have been. He was determined to feel injured whichever way it went. (Hadn't he the gross injustice about the money to put up with in any case? Whoever heard of mere girls getting as much as their brother?) After his marriage therefore he cut himself off from them and retired to the suburbs, a fact for which he never forgave them.

Two years before this day at Fields however, Mrs. Standish had encountered him and Penelope at the house of an old friend of the family and impulsively decided to give the girl a chance. She did not care in the least whether her precious brother liked it or not, for she shared their late father's opinion of him, and Penelope's expression, intense, critical, almost sharp, told its own story. She invited the girl to come and see her, certain she would fight tooth and nail against her father or anybody else who tried to prevent it, and sure enough she came. The interchange of visits stopped short with the younger part of both families. Ida went to the Croziers, and Penelope came to Buckingham Gate and Fields. McMorris met her there and nowhere else, and considered the latter fact a mercy. He had lost both parents some years before, the place in Scotland was let, and three parts of his income went to pay off the diminishing mortgages. In his agreeable bachelor life in London Mrs. Standish and Ida were the only relatives he needed, and he considered Penelope's occasional appearance in the family a distinct intrusion.

Now he pulled the punt into a little haven of overhanging trees, made fast and lay back among the cushions, his eyes following every line of the wavering green tracery that high above patterned the roof of the world. About him the trees dipped their long fingers in the water and drew them up bejewelled in a moment-

ary gust of wind. The same wind set the sunlight dancing like a host of silver butterflies, and soon he forgot the dull catalogue of his cousin's guests and every other human foolishness.

II

The one person who loomed at all clearly on his horizon by and by was Ida herself, Ida in her cool muslin, with her serenely smiling eyes, an appropriate centre somehow for the gardens at Fields and the little river drifting to Stratford town. When he came to think it over he had a vague suspicion that Ida Standish might be his ultimate fate, and he wondered whether it had ever occurred to her. The matter did not disturb him greatly because marriage was hardly an intimate question to him at the moment. His was the average young man view that it was a kind of reckoning with time, to be made in company with the most fascinating girl of his acquaintance, when other diversions had begun to pall. Generally speaking it was quite a good scheme, and of course a fine thing for the women, who must be counted out of the running at 25 however. Here was an obstacle, for Ida and he were of an age. In ten years or so when he was ready to settle down, she would be a middle-aged woman.

This weighty but inartistic truth disturbed the picture and he gave up the contemplation of it with some irritation. After all why waste time considering marriage with a week of Fields and the river before one?

He slipped out into the stream again and drifted about for an hour, and then turned back to the pleasant prospect of tea with Ida, at which ceremony he devoutly hoped there would be no disturbing element. His first view of the gardens proved the wish to be vain. The tea-table was already visible under the trees, and about it circled Ida and the lank form of Penelope with a young man and a girl in the background whose attitude needed no explanation.

"Oh damn!" said Mr. McMorris aloud to the world at large. The next moment bringing the punt alongside the little landing-stage he found himself looking into the laughing face of a girl in a pink frock, who had emerged from the screen of trees just in time to hear his eloquent apostrophe.

It was Julien, of course, lured to exploration by a distracting glimpse of the silver river waters.

"She's always like that," Penelope had explained to Ida Standish with melancholy, as the girl rushed away, and Ida, smiling, had called after the departing figure:

"You might look for George McMorris, Julien, an ugly young man in a punt, to be captured alive if possible."

Julien, who had heard of George from Penelope as a person who thought himself clever and was almost too conceited to live, accepted this commission with interest and arrived at the landing-stage just in time.

"If you are Mr. McMorris I have been sent to find you," she informed him twinkling.

"Then I most certainly am," declared McMorris with such decision that she laughed outright.

"That I suppose is to make up for your first word of —er—welcome," she suggested wickedly.

"Sorry, but you know the proverb about listeners?"

"Oh, was it really meant for me then?"

Julien had a way of laughing over her words that the young man's critical ear found suddenly new and very charming. Most girls giggled when you spoke to them, but this was a different matter. It was contagious too and he joined in the chorus.

"I take it back," he told her kindly.

"Perhaps I had better introduce myself. My name s Julien Archer."

"Then I'm almost certain that mine is Romeo McMorris."

Julien, remembering Penelope's estimate of this cousin as extremely dull, chuckled again, but she was not going to see the connection naturally.

"I suppose you are trying to live up to the neighbourhood," she said. "I am sorry to disturb the

picture, but I was sent to bring you to tea, and I'm sure they're eating all the cakes."

"Not cakes," begged the young man soulfully, "make it tarts. They are so much more romantic, please, Juliet."

At this cool impertinence the vision in the pink frock burst out laughing and the two arrived at the tea-table on excellent terms.

McMorris had forgotten by this time his ardent desire for tea alone with Ida Standish. Indeed he barely remembered her existence for the remainder of the afternoon. He was not a particularly susceptible person, but it happened that this girl pleased his fastidious eye and he kept it upon her unobtrusively, with a sense of satisfaction, noticing the graceful lines of her simple little frock and the vivid charm of her face. Julien Archer had few claims to classic beauty, but she was straight and slim and wonderfully alive, with direct and rather deep grey eyes, and a clear skin faintly coloured. He noticed that she looked at one eagerly and with ready interest, and her smile had a fine unconscious quality, a kind of radiance that instantly attracted him. But more than these things he was conscious to an extraordinary degree of the spirit that lay behind, a kind of clear force to which some unsuspected chord in his own nature instantly responded. Penelope Crozier had called George McMorris conceited. Civilization had certainly obscured, as it will, the finer shades of a temperament that would have thrived in a less complex atmosphere. But extraordinarily perhaps, beneath the veneer of flippant superiority, he carried like a torch a brain at once sensitive and eager.

He lay at his cousin's feet on the grass but he looked at Julien Archer. They tossed airy words about, Ida joining sometimes, and he called her Miss Capulet until Penelope said puzzled:

"Her name is Miss Archer, George."

Penelope was not exactly the skeleton at the feast, because the metaphor is all too light to meet the

onslaught of her rather weighty conversation. She talked intensely of an object in life, and sighed for what she called *Freedom*, and when Julien chuckled tormentingly, she accused: "Oh you don't have to worry. You are emancipated."

"Never?" exclaimed McMorris reproachfully of Julien, "I wouldn't have believed it of you, Miss Capulet."

"Oh Pen dear," Julien's infectious little chuckle ran through her words, "how am I emancipated, and when and why? It's the first I've heard of it."

"From *everything*. You vote for instance."

"Well yes, put a cross on a piece of paper once in three years."

"It sounds exciting," said Ida, "I hope you don't overdo it, Julien."

"Oh it is easy to be funny, but voting is a symbol. Do you think I've forgotten the free and jolly life you lead at home, Julien? You never have chaperones chasing you in processions and you have hundreds of men friends. I have none, and how am I ever going to marry?"

"But I am not going to marry them," expostulated Julien, astounded.

"Of course not," murmured McMorris approvingly. "Miss Capulet hasn't got an object in life—certainly not a human one, although they do chase her in processions, which I can quite believe. You know, Penelope, your disclosures are becoming really interesting. Give us some more."

"*George*," Penelope was evidently shocked, "Miss Archer will think you have been brought up in a Board School."

"So he has," said Ida, "but he spells it in a different way."

Penelope's lips settled into a thin line, always a menace in a woman of her type, but if it threatened the future intimacy of her cousin and her guest, McMorris, with his usual cool habit of ignoring Penelope as unimportant, failed to notice it. When he considered her

at all it was to wonder what peculiar chance had brought her into any sort of friendly contact with Julien Archer, whose smiling young presence was surely too rich a reward for the rather acid hospitality of the Croziers.

III

These reflections were interrupted presently by a move towards the house, for the remainder of the party had arrived an hour ago by motor, and their appearance on the terrace brought Ida to her feet.

"There is Frances, and I haven't seen her for a century," she declared. "Come and speak to her, all of you."

Penelope carefully attached herself to Julien Archer and instructed:

"Frances means Mrs. Cowle. I begged Aunt Helen to have you here when she was coming because I knew you would be keen on that sort of thing."

"You are a brick," said Julien warmly.

"I'm sorry," continued Penelope in an undertone, "that George McMorris is so rude, but I'm afraid he's like that although he is my cousin. We have very little to do with his side of the family ourselves, but unfortunately the Standishes make an absurd fuss of him."

"It is only his nonsense," Julien consoled her, "and you see I am used to boys."

"I am not allowed to be," pronounced Penelope primly, and in a tone that might have been effective if Julien had chanced to hear it. As a matter of fact Mrs. Standish appeared at the moment on the wide stone terrace steps above them, and the girl hastened forward to meet her, catching sight for the first time as she did so of a tall figure in the rear.

With Ida Standish on one side and her uncle on the other, Mrs. Cowle came slowly towards them, and Julien noticed that she was dark and rather imposing, and beautifully dressed. By all the laws of sentiment and romance the girl should surely have been moved at

this encounter by some supreme emotion, but alas for a commonplace world, these high moments are rarely catalogued for our instruction, and Julien felt only the natural excitement of a rather eager young girl meeting her first celebrity.

She stood unobtrusively in the background while the rest of the party greeted Mrs. Cowle, watching with deep interest. Then Mrs. Standish drew her forward, explaining with an air of large jocularity :

" Here is a new type for you, Frances, so I expect you to be duly grateful. Miss Julien Archer, representing our colonies, God bless 'em."

" Indeed ? " said Mrs. Cowle. Her voice was cool and admirably controlled, her rather hard face betrayed no special interest. " Then I suppose you come from Canada ? " she said.

" Oh no, *Australia*," corrected Penelope eagerly, and Julien smiled at the celebrity and said nothing, since there was obviously nothing left to say.

" Really ? What part of Australia ? " enquired Mrs. Cowle, still with her air of polite boredom.

" Adelaide."

" Adelaide—Oh ! New South Wales, I suppose ? "

Julien, who had already heard these geographical conundrums often enough to make her feel her own knowledge on the subject almost indecent, answered apologetically :

" No, that is Sydney. I come from South Australia."

" How interesting ! You must tell me about it some time," observed the celebrity kindly as she turned to speak to someone else.

This brief conversation seemed distinctly funny to George McMorris, who had been looking on with interest and thought it merely another illustration of Mrs. Cowle's " intolerable poses." Several encounters with that lady had not changed his first harsh impression of her, and he was inclined to be all the more critical because he had once so far fallen from grace as to believe she or any other woman could be a sincere

artist. He decided now that she was ready to dislike Julien Archer, and that was soothing because it proved conclusively the inferiority of her own nature. Another advantage was the fact that Julien, who was just the kind of young enthusiast to be easily captivated by a woman of personality, would not now have this particular excuse to waste the precious hours in the company of her own unprofitable sex. He began to plot ways and means of evading the lynx-eyed Penelope, even Ida Standish, certainly Mrs. Cowle, and spending a very pleasant week indeed.

He would have been surprised to know how little one at least of these women would grudge him a clear field to the society of Julien Archer. Mrs. Cowle had really come to Fields in the clear hope and expectation that her meeting with the girl would completely turn her mind from any desire to see her again, and at first glance she felt sure she had not been mistaken. Julien's young charm made no appeal to her because it was so obviously the charm of someone else who long ago had ceased to move her in the least, and from the moment of their brief encounter, with its inevitable rush of old memories and revolts, she felt only a kind of sickness and weary irritation. She told herself she had no desire for any further knowledge of the girl, and she began devoutly to wish that, having seen her, she could now go back to town. And yet her eyes instinctively followed Julien, and her mind went over like a machine in torturing repetition the details of their meeting. Her only consolation lay in the fact that the plea of work kept her much in her own room, so that their encounters were comparatively few.

To Julien meanwhile, beautifully unaware of her own importance in the scheme of things, these days were full of delight, a circumstance that had little enough to do with Mrs. Cowle or George McMorris or anybody else. She liked the young man, but accepted his presence with the same good-fellowship she gave to Penelope and Ida, not having yet reached that state of indecision where friendships are qualified by sex. Mrs. Cowle's aloofness

too seemed perfectly natural, and rather added to the picture of the celebrity, if anything. Truth to tell, these months of travel had been to the girl a prolonged and glorious adventure, and she was still too much a captive to the charm of new places to have anything more than an all-embracing but quite general interest in the mere human element.

This lovely summer, England was like a land of dreams to her, with its flowery fields and deep cool woods, its towns and little villages, each for ever thrilling her with a mysterious sense of familiarity. It was not only the home of her forefathers but the land of her history and her books, of most of those heroes, real and fictitious, who call to youth down the ages. Here only a mile or two away were actually the spires of Stratford town, and beyond the daisy-covered fields where the larks rose singing in the golden weather above pathways leading to Shottery. For a month too had she not seen, right at her doors, the incomparable romance of London, the green Temple gardens, the long sweep of Whitehall, the Embankment blinking a million eyes at night, Cornhill that has long forgotten its last golden harvest. Yes, surely this was the land of dreams. In the background her own country, splendid and austere, was the reality to which she would awake by and by.

At this time the old strenuous days before the election seemed very far away, and even her sudden, new knowledge of her father was less vivid somehow, a natural result of the changed atmosphere. She came from a land where the man who is not a worker of one kind or another is regarded rather with suspicion than otherwise. Here, among the people with whom she found herself, work seemed to be something alien and mysterious, to be avoided at all costs. She had believed Penelope's father to be a scientist for instance, but she found this in reality meant that he spent an occasional day at the British Museum when he could spare time from his club. Arthur Standish too, the bachelor brother-in-law, who was a more or less permanent part of this pleasant household, showed even

less desire for any form of violent activity. He did nothing, and this in an able-bodied man not much over forty, did not appear to be regarded as at all surprising. Then there was George McMorris. He had gone to the bar, but Penelope scorned the suggestion that he ever really did any work at his profession. Even the amorous youth whom Ida was abetting had not decided, in his early twenties, what he would do with his life, if anything. Beside such a record Julien's father became again a person of boundless achievements.

It was here that the contemplation of Mrs. Cowle made the most direct appeal to the girl's mind. To her young eagerness Life was a deathless game, and beside the placid inaction of Ida Standish for instance, or Penelope with her ineffectual cry for freedom, which was never borne out by any personal effort, who so glorious a player as the celebrity?

Julien came to look at Mrs. Cowle's door as she passed it with a quickened sense of all that went on behind there. If the door opened one might actually see the wheels go round.

CHAPTER VI

THE THIN EDGE OF THE WEDGE

"I do not know what is in my heart . . . I was sorrowful and glad to know you were far away beyond the sea . . . And now I was taken by surprise . . . I went out this morning to see whether the sun was shining over the mountains, and I saw you on the Threshold."

Maurice Maeterlinck.

I

On Thursday morning Mrs. Standish came down to breakfast with a harrowing tale.

"Poor Frances is in despair," she told the rather straggling company. "It appears there are piles of work to be got off to-night, and her wretched secretary, who was to have come down by the first train, has just sent word that she is ill. I fancy Frances is devoutly hoping that she won't recover at the present moment."

"She would," said McMorris darkly.

"But it's very awkward for her," Ida said, "whatever will she do?"

"Do? My dear, we all know Frances. She'll probably kill herself to get the work finished and then discover to-morrow would have done as well. I've told her a woman of her standing who wasn't a perfect fool would refuse to be a slave to these publisher creatures."

"What did she say to that?"

"Say? She said it was not a publisher but an editor, which is as sensible as saying that a clock can't be slow because it is not a watch. Why is it these clever people never have any brains?"

"I wonder if I could help her!" exclaimed Julien eagerly. "Mrs. Standish, do you think I could? I was father's secretary for a year, and I'm quite used to typing and all that sort of thing."

McMorris greeted this suggestion with loud protests.

"Now, Miss Capulet," he expostulated, "what about our game of tennis? I'm not going to give up my rights for all the silly novelists in the kingdom. Besides Mrs. Cowle is a tartar who sticks pins in her poor secretary on the slightest provocation. I've seen it in her eye."

"I'll risk it," declared Julien, "I'd simply love to if Mrs. Standish thinks it any good. Shall I go and offer at least?"

"Aunt Helen, don't you let her. Be a man and forbid it. Oh hang it all, why should Miss Archer give up a whole day to that old cat?"

"*George*, you might remember she is Aunt Helen's guest." This was Penelope, of course.

"Julien my dear," said Mrs. Standish drily, "you may have noticed that relations are people who invariably mind your own business. Please take no notice of mine and do exactly as you like. If you can do anything for Frances I shall regard you as a philanthropist."

"There! that's a threat that ought to stop you," declared McMorris, but Julien departed laughing, and in a moment was at Mrs. Cowle's door, athrill with this latest adventure of all.

She knocked, and in answer to a call went in. Mrs. Cowle was at a desk near the window, papers strewn around her, and a breakfast tray on a table at her side. She looked up irritably and, seeing Julien, rose startled to her feet.

"Yes?" she said in a tone of tense enquiry that would have surprised the girl if she had been in the habit of noticing such things.

Julien came further into the room.

"Oh, Mrs. Cowle, could I help you?" she offered. "About your secretary I mean? I can type and I should love to do it."

Mrs. Cowle answered with unmistakable irony:

"You are most kind, but I am afraid that amateur assistance is hardly what I want."

"But I am not an amateur," Julien eagerly explained, "I was secretary to my father for over a year,

and I have been thoroughly trained. I'm sure I could do it if you would let me try."

Frances looked at her oddly.

"Indeed! but isn't that a little unusual? I mean that you hardly fit the picture of the poor, overworked young woman who has to battle for her living in a hard world."

"I didn't," said Julien smiling, "I was only unofficial secretary of course, but I loved it."

Mrs. Cowle could understand that at least, but it gave her a queer feeling to hear the sentiment from Julien. It was one of the things she had been so sure this charming daughter of a charming father would never understand. She could not believe it even now, and she said:

"I'm afraid you wouldn't love being my secretary even for a day. I am a very irritable person."

"Oh, so was father, often."

Here again they met on mutual ground it seemed, for Mrs. Cowle found herself smiling in sudden appreciation. It occurred to her that after all the situation was weird enough to be rather entertaining, and the girl's cool confidence in herself and smiling unconcern had at least the charm of novelty. She was clearly modern, alive too, and above all young. The elder woman suddenly felt her own youth stirring, and with that came an overwhelming desire to set aside her scruples and keep the girl beside her for this one day at least with whatever tumult of emotion or knowledge of herself such an experiment might bring. At the same time she felt perversely bound to argue against any such possibility, so she said:—

"Yes, but I can hardly expect you to put up with the irritability of a stranger, and I don't think really you had better take it on. Why should you after all? You didn't come to England to type the manuscripts of hapless authors, now did you?"

"I never supposed I should have the luck," said Julien, and then they laughed.

II

Of course she stayed, and in two minutes was at work, while Mrs. Cowle sat in the background, ostensibly working too, but really watching her. She found it very difficult indeed to avoid doing that. It was not only that Julien's competence and absorption amazed her, although both were surprising in her father's daughter. It was something outside that, the girl herself, the shining clear picture of her, and the whole preposterous situation with its very real hint of dangers ahead.

She got up presently on the plea of giving Julien some directions, and as she stood looking down at her, enquired :

" You are not alone in England, are you ? "

" Yes," said Julien, " at least I came over with friends, and I suppose I shall go home with other friends next year, but we are quite independent of each other."

" Then your—people are not with you ? "

" No, my father detests the sea so I am sure we should never drag him to England. Mother may come in a few years perhaps, when the children have left school."

" Oh, the children ? How many are there of you ? "

" Only two others. A boy and a girl."

" I wonder your mother was persuaded to part with you ? "

Mrs. Cowle said this rather expecting a denial, but none came. Julien answered with a little smile :

" Leaving her behind was the only thing that spoilt it."

" Ah ! I see, you are your mother's girl."

This at least should have provoked some explanation of their real relationship. Frances hardly knew why she wanted it, but when again it did not come and the girl's expression was eloquent of acquiescence, she felt a sudden sense of injury and pain. She turned away and went back to her work.

But after all it was quite possible Julien did not know, and that she really thought she was—this other woman's daughter. She had been little more than a baby at the time of the second marriage. Mrs. Cowle remembered the occasion because it was one of the things that, absurdly enough, she had never counted upon. And sometimes parents did hide such matters from their children, foolish as it was. It was unfair too, distinctly unfair. What right had they to allow Julien to imagine any such thing?

She became really angry about it, until all at once her sense of humour overcame this feeling and she realised the full satire of the argument, or indeed any argument at all from her.

Long ago she had relinquished quite definitely the right to consider what "they" might or might not do with regard to Julien, and now for the first time she had a hint of how she might have to pay for that, even though she would not call it paying. On the heels of this came deep irritation that she had ever been persuaded to come to Fields and that, having come, she had permitted the girl to intrude upon her in this preposterous fashion. She might have known it would never answer.

And yet she was glad to have her there. She realised this when presently it was luncheon time and they went downstairs together, Julien rather elated than otherwise after the morning's work. They were shoulder to shoulder and she might have put out her hand and touched the girl, and yet she could not. It surprised her to know that such a thing might be a deprivation.

III

At luncheon McMorris hailed Julien, ostensibly about the neglected tennis, but Mrs. Cowle, looking up and catching his hostile gaze upon her, became instantly aware that his little diatribe was really directed at her.

"I say, Miss Archer, what about our set after lunch?"

he said. "You can't possibly stay indoors all day, you know. It's against the rules, besides being cruelty to animals, meaning me. If you don't take pity on me I shall be forced to fling myself into the raging billows of the mighty Avon."

"I'm afraid you'll bump your head then," said Julien chuckling.

"Perhaps that is what's the matter with it now," suggested Ida with cousinly politeness, but McMorris ignored this and continued to Julien:

"Will you be ready about three?"

"To-morrow perhaps. I'm having a holiday from tennis to-day."

McMorris, turning an injured eye upon his aunt, protested:

"Rotten hospitality on your part, Aunt Helen, to work your guests so hard. Here's Miss Archer thoroughly fagged out already."

"Oh no she isn't," contradicted Julien blandly. "Your tennis is pretty violent, Mr. McMorris, but it isn't such hard work as all that."

"Well played," observed Arthur Standish privately to Mrs. Cowle. "Do you know I like your little aide-de-camp."

"Apparently someone else does too."

"So I see and that isn't our only point of agreement. I wonder what you have done to *him*."

Frances smiled at the emphasis and said drily:

"I'm afraid I have written books, and he is a critic, isn't he?"

"Only by the way I think. His real profession is the bar."

"Oh that goes without saying. England is full of young men who have been called to the bar to hide their connection with art and literature and other disreputable professions," declared Frances.

At that moment they heard Penelope at the other end of the table say in her intense voice to George McMorris: "But Julien thinks it is a privilege to work for Mrs. Cowle."

"You see you are avenged," whispered Standish, "George has drawn down the weighty eloquence of Miss Crozier, and I can scarcely imagine anything more devastating. She always reminds me of an elephant trampling one's conversational garden. The flowers of speech wilt at her approach."

"My dear Arthur, do take care of your similes. Think of the bouquet she has just flung at me. I'm afraid that will hurt poor Mr. McMorris very much."

Standish looked reflectively down the table and said after a moment:

"Yes, I remember now. He cut up your last book rather, didn't he? Helen was extremely fluent on the subject and I daresay he's feeling injured because you don't bear him any malice. Christian forbearance of that kind is very hard to put up with, you know. It shows such a poor appreciation of one's efforts."

"Oh, he was not far wrong about the book, and I think as a matter of fact his dislike goes back farther than that. The first time I met him I noticed it."

"Hum! the beauty of that, of course, is that the little Archer girl is extraordinarily like you if he only knew it."

Mrs. Cowle caught her breath. Then she looked straight at her old friend.

"I'm afraid you're getting short-sighted," she said.

"Not in the least. I'm not talking about outward appearances. That would be absurd. It's a matter of temperament and disposition. She reminds me of the girl I used to know."

"Ah, my friend, it is so long ago that you have forgotten what that girl was really like—if you ever knew."

He smiled.

"You don't suppose I can't see through all these protests," he said. "They simply mean you've noticed it yourself."

"Yes," she said, smiling too and suddenly confidential, "at least I'll admit I like to think so, a sure sign I am getting old."

" At thirty-nine ? "

Mrs. Cowle looked up and almost contradicted, but changed her mind in time.

" As if years had anything to do with it ? " was all she said.

IV

Someone else broke into the conversation then, killing it of course. Frances said little for the rest of the meal, leaving the field to Arthur Standish.

Although the acuteness of his observation had startled her at first, she knew there was little danger here, for the friendship between them was of the kind that could not in any circumstances be menacing on either side. If she had been inclined for confidences, she believed that she could have trusted him with her story, but that was one of the follies she had sternly denied herself. To stand absolutely alone may not be an inspiring prospect, but it is wonderfully safe. Frances had had for years this sense of safety. She had it specially now.

From the contemplation of this subject she turned presently to the more complex matter of George McMorris. With a nature acutely sensitive to other people's impressions of her, and a mind that mocked and continually defeated her own wishes in this direction, she was quite aware of the young man's antagonism. Now as she reviewed the matter, it seemed to her the more unfair because it was in no way mutual. She was inclined to like McMorris, for like most highly strung women she possessed to an extraordinary degree that instinct of self-protection which the world calls intuition. This primitive sense, in so many people dulled by civilization, was particularly keen in her case because for many years she had known few people with any intimacy, and had almost lived, it might be said, out of the world. She had learned to trust her own judgment, and this had already assailed her in favour of George McMorris. She was, however,

human enough to be obstinately determined that he should not have his way about the tennis, and as soon as luncheon was over, she and Julien went straight back to work. But once in her own room she said to the girl:

"Are you sure you don't want to go and play with the other children?"

"Rather," said Julien with enthusiasm, and added, "I can play tennis any day."

"I hope *you* are not going to tell me it is a privilege to work for Mrs. Cowle," begged Frances, and Julien chuckled.

"Oh no, but I think it's rather a lark," she said. "Mrs. Cowle, wouldn't Penelope be shocked if she heard me?"

"Penelope takes life rather seriously I'm afraid?"

"She takes me seriously, which is worse, because it's a thing I've not been used to. Of course she's a dear, but she will talk to me about emancipation, and I don't know what in the world she means."

"You don't have such things in Canada?"

"Penelope says we have. She talks about it as though it were a kind of very rare disease only found in strange countries. She is always explaining to her mother that I've got it, and I'm afraid it rather worries poor Mrs. Crozier. I tell her that I'd never heard of the beastly thing till I came to England."

"No, I suppose the people who have it never do hear of it," observed Frances. And Julien exclaimed, laughing reproachfully:

"Oh, Mrs. Cowle, how horrid of you. I have a good mind to go and play that game of tennis after all."

She had perched herself during this conversation on a corner of the writing-table, and now she jumped down and began to work again. She had a habit of camping about in odd places, for she had absolutely no sense of her own dignity or anyone else's, it appeared to Mrs. Cowle. And yet there was something rather attractive than otherwise in her cool and perfectly natural manner of dropping into a situation and making herself at home there. She had a good voice too, clear and full of lights

and shades, a pleasant contrast to the high, level, unimaginative tones of many Englishwomen. Frances watching her first with criticism, then with an almost uneasy attention, saw, beyond all this, several little graces that she was reluctantly glad to see. Julien had natural good taste not only in the things she said but in those she did not say. She had not remarked upon the elder woman's geographical eccentricities—they had been deliberate traps for her undoing too. Neither had she expressed, after the kindly and patronising manner of outsiders generally, her tolerating pleasure in Mrs. Cowle's books, but this morning, as she typed a short story, she had suddenly exclaimed:

"Isn't this boy a darling?"

And Frances, who was rarely moved by comments on her work, found that the most charming tribute she had ever known.

All this was distracting enough, and she soon found that stern concentration was her only remedy if she wished to keep pace with the busy tapping of the typewriter; so she moved to the other window where she had her back to Julien, and for the remainder of the afternoon worked there in silence. But the strain of locking up the sudden rush of impressions and emotions, and bending her mind to her will as usual, had become suddenly intolerable, and once when Julien came to ask her some trivial question, she answered with a little gust of impatience:

"*Oh*, do use your own common sense."

Julien, quite imperturbable, did, but Frances thought in consternation, "Good heavens, it is clear I could not stand much of this."

Altogether she was relieved when towards tea time the girl added the last neat page to the little pile at her elbow and there was nothing more to be done.

"Is that really all?" she asked. "What a heavenly window to write at, isn't it? You can actually see the spires of Stratford, and isn't this garden a dream? It seems to have been here for ever."

"Do you care about such things?"

She flushed and laughed a little.

"They make me feel frightfully excited," she said.

And Frances, who had not meant to say anything of the kind, found herself exclaiming:

"I should like to keep you altogether. You're a delightful secretary."

They laughed.

"If you only lived in Australia, I should come and demand a billet at once," declared Julien.

"And desert your father?"

"Oh, father doesn't want me any more. He is not in politics now."

The girl's voice had sobered and for a second there was a faint shadow in her eyes which Frances recognised with a little shock. It was so unmistakably another signal from her own youth.

"Ah well, perhaps if he had been," she said consolingly, "he would not have been able to spare you now."

"Oh no, of course not," agreed Julien eagerly. "I should not be here if he had got in at the last election, so it was very lucky for me, wasn't it? And poor old father was a brick about it. He didn't mind a bit."

Mrs. Cowle at this juncture looked at her watch.

"Do you know it is after five," she said, "and I am sure you are tired to death. Go and have your tea, my child, and a thousand thanks for all you have done."

Julien went with a sense of chill she could not understand, and which it must be admitted, she very soon forgot.

CHAPTER VII

" About me leagues of houses lie,
Above me grim and straight and high
They climb; the terraces lean up
Like long grey reefs against the sky."

Arthur H. Adams.

I

FOR the remainder of the week at Fields, George McMorris had no further cause to feel injured with Mrs. Cowle, for she rather avoided Julien Archer than otherwise, although she never could resist a smile in answer to the girl's friendly glances.

" I believe you like that old cat," George remarked resentfully to Julien one morning as she waved an hilarious hand to Mrs. Cowle in passing her window.

" She isn't old and she is certainly not a cat and of course I do," declared Julien in a breath. " Mrs. Cowle is the first really great person I've ever known."

" Yes, a great nuisance."

" Poor Mr. McMorris ! Doesn't she appreciate you ? "

" Good lord, I hope not."

" What a nasty jealous disposition," chuckled Julien. " Is Mr. Cowle a writer too by the way ? "

" No, a myth ! "

" Mr. McMorris, you are perfectly horrid."

" There now you are shocked, and I did think you were above anything so commonplace as that. You must have caught it from Penelope. I say, Miss Archer, can you imagine Penelope's knowing anybody whose husband was a myth ? "

" At least I can't imagine Penelope's telling such outrageous fibs," said Miss Archer with dignity.

George grinned.

" All right, I'll take it back," he said obligingly, " he wasn't a myth, he was a worm. He must have been to marry her, and now no doubt he's 3,567,892 other

worms—under the churchyard sod you know, and all that sort of thing. And you needn't look like that, because my conversation is strictly Shakespearean. The Bard was the dead limit on worms. (You always call him the Bard when you're staying at Stratford, because the natives like it.) And if you're very good, Juliet, I'll introduce you to the great, great, great, grandson of the Chief Worm-in-Waiting to the Capulet family vault."

At this generous offer Julien was almost reduced to tears, so that Penelope, coming up with them, exclaimed:

"What in the world are you laughing at? I never find George so amusing."

"Ah," said George, "my wit is too subtle for you, Penelope. We were discussing Worms, the Diet of you know."

"Oh! you always have some food fad or other," contemptuously answered Penelope, who had long ago forgotten any history she had condescended to know.

Penelope was glad the week at Fields was nearly over, for it seemed to her that Julien was seeing a great deal too much of McMorris, a state of affairs she did not intend to continue. They rowed together, played tennis together, explored the countryside together. They had even got up one morning early, punted to Stratford, and spent the greater part of the day wandering about the quaint old town. Penelope was secretly worried about the propriety of this, but did not say so because the excursion had been of Ida's arranging, and the Standishes generally were Penelope's final anchor in the stormy and difficult seas of social observance. It was of course impossible that Ida should have let Julien do anything that wasn't quite proper, but perhaps she had not realised that the girl was rather young and not very serious minded. As for George, he would do anything. He was just that kind of person.

It was characteristic of Penelope that while she cried aloud for freedom and affected to despise conventions,

she was in reality the most rigid soul alive, particularly in her rules for the conduct of other people.

II

In the train going back to London Julien remarked to Penelope:

"Won't it be jolly? Did Mr. McMorris tell you, he's going to take us over the Temple one day and give us tea in his rooms afterwards. He is going to write to you about it."

"Oh dear, Mamma would faint at the very suggestion," declared Penelope decidedly. "We couldn't possibly go to George's rooms without a chaperone."

"But wouldn't Mrs. Crozier come too?"

"Good gracious no! She doesn't even know him. Mamma is not good enough for the great Mr. McMorris."

"Pen, how absurd you are."

Julien felt uncomfortable. Moreover she did not believe George McMorris was the kind of snob his cousin's tone so deftly suggested. She had noticed that Penelope was rather given to this sort of subtle depreciation of her mother, which had an element of defiance in it too, for she was one of those people who live in the perpetual expectation of being looked down upon by a superior world.

The Croziers lived at 49 Tarrant Square, S.W., and it was a matter for secret satisfaction to Penelope that this address might sound a good deal more imposing than it was. Tarrant Square, as any estate agent would tell you, is a quiet, ultra-respectable, middle-class residential quarter, but it would be difficult to say which of these adjectives she detested most. She had an earnest conviction—all her convictions were earnest—that through her connection with the Standishes, and even the despised McMorris, she had been meant for more exciting spheres, but it is probable that her real complaint was the common one of having nothing to do and too much time to do it in. Even the world-

tour with her father had not made her any more contented, for after that delirious freedom, the restrictions of a London suburb were irksome indeed.

But if she expected sympathy or even secret criticism from her guest in this connection, she was disappointed. Julien's enthusiasms were still untarnished, and this new world and every moment in it were a keen delight to her. She loved at first sight the quiet old square with its decorous lawns and flower-beds, and the tall, long lines of houses, so unlike anything she had known. She loved the inside of the house, so unmistakably English, with its wide windows opening on iron shelves that were apologies for balconies, and its neatly dressed chairs in their flowery chintz. She would have been the most easy person in the world to entertain if Penelope had not been so perversely determined to make the most of her as a lever in the household.

The invitation to Julien Archer had been given for no other reason, and Mr. Crozier had upheld it because he had been forced to remember much hospitality on the other side of the world, and he liked to repay even a cup of tea. It had not been thought necessary to consult Mrs. Crozier, who later however at Penelope's stern dictation, wrote the necessary letter to Julien's parents.

Penelope firmly believed her mother had opposed Julien's coming from the first, but truth to tell, the poor lady had agreed to it eagerly, for she was the most hospitable soul alive and had few enough chances, between her husband and her daughter, of indulging her tastes in this direction. For some reason she could not fathom, they rarely asked their friends to Tarrant Square, and when she did so the result was nearly always disastrous. She thought it a peculiar thing that both Penelope and her father should be so unsociable. In his bitter moments Mr. Crozier recognised that he had never in his life done anything successfully except marry the wrong woman, but that she never guessed. As for Penelope, this was her one secret criticism against her father.

It is certain that Mrs. Crozier did unconsciously defeat all along the line her daughter's social aspirations, for anyone less pretentious it would have been difficult to find. She had married her husband entirely for love, and his smart relatives alarmed her a little, and during their brief acquaintance she never managed to keep pace with them. She had not the combination of arrogance and ingratitude that makes the successful climber and she still found pleasure among the friends of her impecunious girlhood, with whom she kept up a voluminous, and in Penelope's eyes, a preposterous correspondence.

Her husband, meanwhile, spent his days between the British Museum and his club, dining with old friends occasionally and going to Scotland in the orthodox way with one of them every August. His wife never participated in these hospitalities, nor did he return them in kind, but in tickets for Ranelagh and Hurlingham, and the flower shows and an occasional theatre box. It was generally supposed among his friends that Mrs. Crozier never went out and was a semi-invalid, but while she knew nothing of this, it never occurred to her to grudge him his little festivities. Penelope was of a different clay. She was her father's daughter, and as soon as she was old enough to do so, took care that she should be included in any jollifications, pitying herself meanwhile because they were so few and she had not the kind of mother she felt she had a right to expect.

Such was the household in which Julien found herself a guest, and after the intimate affection of her own home, this very different atmosphere seemed to her at first surprising and then almost pathetic.

"You mustn't mind Mamma," Penelope had warned her in the beginning. "Of course you will find her a little strange because she belongs to the old school and has very strict views about things. It's hard on me because of course it means I have no freedom whatever."

It astounded Julien to find very soon that Penelope had actually made herself believe these things, the

absurdity of which a very brief knowledge of her hostess made clear.

"I love young people, my dear," Mrs. Crozier confided to Julien in her turn, "but unfortunately I see very few. Penelope doesn't make many friends, and, of course, you won't mention it will you, but I am afraid she is a little inclined to be critical. There are plenty of nice lively young people I could ask here, but dear me, you mustn't suggest such a thing. Not to be thought of. It all comes of the small family. Now I had six brothers and we were really gay, songs at the piano every night, and father and mother enjoying it as much as we did. Ah, but six brothers you see, and all in the business. We were a *very* united family."

Mrs. Crozier often referred with pride to "the business," but Julien never discovered what it was, though it was evidently a source of continual irritation to Penelope.

"Mamma, from the way you talk," she protested once, "Julien will imagine that grandfather kept a shop."

"Oh dear no, it wasn't a shop," exclaimed Mrs. Crozier placidly, "although I've often thought that would be really interesting; so nice and chatty to have people coming in and out all day for their little bits of silk and cotton, and what not . . . Or cakes now, but not fruit. That would be much too messy."

"Mamma, how can you?" protested Penelope in a shocked tone.

"Or sweets," continued Mrs. Crozier reminiscently. "I've always thought a sweet shop would be a very nice thing to have ever since I was a child, but then I have a sweet tooth. You haven't, Penelope, so you can't be expected to understand that."

"I should hope not," said Penelope with dignity, and walked out of the room.

"Ah my dear, she takes after her father," Mrs. Crozier informed Julien. "She ought to have been a man. I always say my son would have made a much nicer girl than his sister, but there, one can't have every-

thing in this world as I tell Penelope, and I'm sure when one thinks of all the poor people who haven't a shirt to their backs, one must be grateful for anything."

Julien had never met the son of the house, who it appeared did not live at home. Penelope's references to him were a little mysterious but also extremely frank.

"Tony is a detestable person," she said, "I can never understand how I came to have such a brother."

But after all, as Julien reflected, Penelope was inclined to be astonished at Fate respecting many of her relatives, so that her evidence could hardly be taken too literally. One morning Mrs. Crozier beckoned the girl into her room, where she was immersed in correspondence, and evidently enjoying herself very much.

"I wanted to show you my boy's picture," she said in a cautious tone. "There now, isn't he a dear fellow?"

Julien took up the photograph and saw a rather handsome young man with a good mouth and an expression that seemed vaguely familiar to her.

"He does look a dear. Why, he is rather like Mr. McMorris," she exclaimed.

"You don't say so? Now, how interesting," said Mrs. Crozier delighted. "No one has ever told me that before, and you see I don't know George McMorris myself. Penelope—" in a half whisper—"dislikes him so very much, but then we all know Penelope. She's critical, my dear, far too critical, although you won't mention it of course."

"I rather liked him," admitted Julien, "and I am sure I should like Tony. I wonder if I shall see him while I'm here."

"Ah! that we never know," said Mrs. Crozier shaking her head. "It's his father you see. Men are such difficult creatures, but there, we all have our failings I suppose."

Whose failings or just what they were Julien found it impossible to guess, nor was there any further conversation about George McMorris, though she would have welcomed that. There had been no word from him regarding the excursion to the Temple as far

as she knew, but it was quite possible Penelope had heard and did not choose to mention it. For some reason that she did not try to analyse, Julien felt she could not ask questions on this subject. Consequently she heard nothing.

At the end of the month she and Penelope joined some Australian friends in a tour of the Norwegian Fiords and when they returned August was well advanced and the house in Tarrant Square wearing the requisite and necessary smug air of repose. It seemed to Julien indeed that the whole atmosphere of London had changed, was more cosmopolitan, and not a whit less exciting than the city she had left a few weeks before, and she wanted to have the hood of the taxi down, driving from the station, so that she should miss none of this new atmosphere. Penelope was shocked at the suggestion and refused it point blank. She was a little inclined to treat Julien as a small child who could not be expected to know how to behave.

"If we do," she instructed, "the neighbours will see us going home, or at least their servants will. It's really very annoying that we should have to come back to London in August. It looks so funny."

"Aren't you supposed to, then?" enquired Julien much diverted.

"Good gracious no. Everybody goes away in August."

Julien thought of the crowded streets and smiled, but did not seek enlightenment on that point. It was one of the things she had learned in self-defence not to do.

From Tarrant Square they went the same afternoon to join Mrs. Crozier at Bournemouth for the remainder of the summer.

"Ah, you'll see plenty of life at Bournemouth, my dear," Mrs. Crozier had promised Julien. "Now that's what I call a really nice place, bands playing all day long, and so much going on, not dull like London."

So Julien saw life for a month, and it was late September before they returned to Tarrant Square. Penelope

still kept silent on the subject of George McMorris, but one day shortly after their return, Julien happened to meet him in Regent Street. She had gone shopping with Mrs. Crozier, who adored this strenuous occupation and made a pilgrimage to the half-yearly sales with almost religious regularity, in spite of the open scorn of her husband and daughter. She was one of those women who love bargains, by which they mean all those expensive articles that are almost certain to come in useful one day, but somehow never do. She had cupboards full of such things at home, and every now and then when life seemed rather dull she would take a morning to go through them, finding tremendous pleasure in the process. There were other purchases that never came home to Tarrant Square at all.

"One or two little things I promised to get for a friend, my dear," she said to Julien, to explain an assortment of hats, stockings, a last season's fur coat and a roll of silk she had bought on this particular morning, "but you won't mention it to Penelope, will you? She thinks I should not undertake shopping for other people."

Julien saw through this kind-hearted little fairy tale and assisted with all the more gusto in the choice of the things, and it was just as they were emerging from the fray that they ran into George McMorris.

Mrs. Crozier was a little in front, her hat at a rakish angle, one feather lurching over her eye and her whole air eloquent of a triumphant morning. A haughty commissionaire followed, weighed down with trophies from the fight, and Julien, enjoying the antics of this dignitary, was bringing up the rear, when a familiar voice exclaimed :—

"Miss Archer, I say, what luck!"

Miss Archer, with her usual lack of dignity, said: "Hullo!" and beamed upon the young man. Then as she remembered Mrs. Crozier and the taxi, she added on an impulse :

"I've been shopping with your aunt. Won't you come and speak to her?"

McMorris groaned.

"Oh horrors! not on your life," he said. "That is, if she's like Penelope."

"She isn't in the least," declared Julien, "but don't come on my account. Good-bye, Mr. McMorris."

That settled it of course. McMorris went and was received by Mrs. Crozier with kind-hearted effusion.

"Now this is nice!" she declared, dropping parcels all over the floor of the taxi as she leant out to greet him. "And to think I've never seen you before, though I did meet your mother once and your father too. Yes, they were both at my wedding, but that was many years ago, and you would hardly remember it. You are like her too. But dear me, I mustn't keep you standing there in the street. Julien my dear, get in, and won't you come home to luncheon with us, my dear boy, now we have met you in this delightful way? We are relations after all, so we needn't stand on ceremony, as I often tell Penelope."

"Rather not," said the young man with an alacrity that astonished Julien, "I should like to come very much if you'll put up with me."

So he came, upsetting Penelope thereby in a manner that would have delighted him beyond measure if he had only known.

CHAPTER VIII

PENELOPE STAYS AT HOME

" Cross patch,
Draw the latch,
Sit by the fire and spin."

I

PENELOPE indeed was so annoyed at her cousin's appearance at Tarrant Square that she did not trouble to hide the fact. She treated him with frigid politeness, and as soon as an opportunity occurred, catechised Julien and bullied her mother for having given the invitation. For once, however, Mrs. Crozier was insensible to her daughter's reproaches. She liked boys, and this boy, whom Penelope had painted as far too fine a personage for Tarrant Square, was after all no more terrifying than her own son.

To Julien looking on, it seemed that his fineness was altogether of another type, for he swiftly established a kind of protective relationship with his aunt—it might almost have been a secret alliance against Penelope—took her under his wing as it were, with an utter disregard for the quality of his own feathers, and this was a relief. The girl had met for the first time in the Crozier household those mighty barriers of caste which in our middle-class England so often imprison the kind hearts that are supposed to be more than coronets, and unaccustomed to any such obstacle to friendly intercourse with the world at large, it had troubled her a good deal. It had besides at least this effect upon her that McMorris' unaffected command of the situation, which three months ago would have seemed merely a matter of course, now became almost a virtue. She did not realise this, but she did know as he said good-bye, after pledging himself to his newly-found aunt for

Sunday afternoon, that somehow this meeting marked a new phase in her regard for him.

It is equally certain that it marked the decline in the friendship of the two girls. Penelope immediately decided that Julien was responsible for McMorris' presence, and as the days wore on her resentment grew, much to the secret discomfort of her guest. The fact was that McMorris had the talent, in Penelope as certainly lacking, of fitting into most situations when he chose, and after the first visit or two he had taken complete possession of his aunt. She for her part had in her nature, like most women who have given in to others all their lives, a fundamental obstinacy, which, once aroused, it is almost impossible to move. And that it had arisen now by the simple fact of her meeting with her husband's nephew, was not so surprising after all. For the young man, with his all conquering gaiety, his little possessive airs and graces, reminded her irresistibly of the romance of her own youth. Vague and middle-aged and disillusioned, she had seen that romance fade into a grey routine, yet the picture of its old splendour, grown more brilliant with the years, it has to be admitted, was still enough to dazzle her. Such women as Mrs. Crozier have these secret refuges.

So she encouraged the young man to come to the house and aided and abetted all his little plans for theatre-parties and sight-seeing excursions on Julien's behalf, turning for once a deaf ear to Penelope's angry protests. The girl then sought her father's intervention, but much to her astonishment, he would not uphold her. Mr. Crozier, who had grown didactic with the years, now announced that blood was thicker than water, and he was actually beginning to believe it, always provided the blood in question was his own (this, in spite of that old legacy). George McMorris was his sister's son and that settled it. What possible objection to his presence could Penelope advance?

Penelope would have found that hard to explain, though her dislike of George McMorris was genuine enough. She said to Julien one morning after a hope-

less argument with her mother on the vexed question :

" I wish you would not encourage George to come here."

She had not meant to put it so abruptly or to sound ungracious, but of course she did both, and her guest coloured with embarrassment, though more on Penelope's account than her own.

" *Penelope!*" she exclaimed.

" Oh well, you know what I mean. I wish you'd encourage him not to come."

" But it isn't any business of mine whether he comes or not, and of course he comes because your mother asks him."

" Mamma is only an excuse and I know he makes fun of her afterwards."

Julien looked uncomfortable.

" Pen dear, don't be absurd," she said, " what is there to make fun of ? I'm sure Mr. McMorris is very fond of your mother, and I am too."

" I didn't ask you here to be fond of Mamma," declared Penelope miserably.

This was getting worse than ever. Julien found the situation as new as it was painful, and she hadn't the vaguest idea how to meet it, so she looked out of the window in silence, while Penelope, conscious of having said the wrong thing with more than usual success, watched her unhappily.

" It's no good, I haven't any luck," she said at last. " I seem to have a kind of fate that makes me always care for people that don't care for me."

For one bewildered moment Julien imagined this to be a reference to George McMorris ; the next she recognised the wildness of such a supposition and wondered with new embarrassment if it were meant for her.

" What nonsense," she said, " of course people care for you. And in any case whatever has that to do with Mr. McMorris's coming here ? "

" If you really cared for me you wouldn't want him to come here when you know I don't like it."

The childishness of this argument would have been amusing in less awkward circumstances but Julien was far too perplexed to find it so. It was obviously no good to deny any wish for McMorris' presence for Penelope would make that a weapon against her mother. It seemed to her the best thing she could do was to drop so unprofitable a conversation, at least until she had had time to think the situation over, so she moved towards the door, but Penelope caught her hand in passing with a little piteous exclamation.

" Ah, don't go," she begged, " Julien, you're the only friend I've ever had and now they're taking you from me."

" You old silly, of course they're not. Do you think I'm a kind of chattel to be taken away as you call it by anyone who comes along ? " declared Julien lightly. She smiled and then suddenly the other girl put a pair of awkward arms around her and held her tight, while Julien, very much abashed, was torn between protest and acquiescence. She knew of no quality in herself that could have aroused this tempestuous affection. She did know that she could not return it and she felt secretly guilty as though somehow she had been to blame for this. And yet she shrank from hurting Penelope by any lack of warmth.

" It's all very well to practise on me," she teased her at last, " but I think it a very bad sign and there must be a man in the case. If so, Penelope, I do think you might be a Christian and marry him while I'm in England, and please remember I expect to be chief bridesmaid."

" You never will be," Penelope declared with tragic conviction. " Who do you think would be silly enough to marry me ? "

II

Although the conversation was for the moment lured into safer channels the fact remained to trouble Julien who found herself more and more a convenient shuttle-

cock in the Crozier household. As Penelope expected to monopolise the whole of her guest's time and attention, so did Mrs. Crozier, always with the kindest motives in the world, and quite ignorant of the discomfort she was causing, make continual demands of the girl which she could not, in common courtesy to her hostess, disregard.

That these little difficulties were too often coincident with McMorris' presence was also clear enough, and this naturally added to their embarrassment. On one occasion the young man arrived unexpectedly to luncheon, and Penelope from an upper window chanced to see him coming. She hurried into hat and gloves and arrived downstairs dressed to go out.

"I think it's time you got ready, Julien," she remarked as she greeted her cousin. "We shall have to go in a few minutes."

"Good gracious me! You're not going out, Penelope" exclaimed her mother, as Julien in some astonishment prepared to obey. "Nonsense, child, sit down again. I've heard nothing of any engagement this morning, and Penelope can't rush off and leave her visitors like this."

"George is not a visitor," declared Penelope calmly. "He's only a relation."

"One of nature's mistakes in fact," supplemented the young man.

Penelope glared at him.

"I don't see why you should blame nature," she said shortly.

"Well, I thought you seemed bent on blaming somebody and it's too bad to put it all on to Aunt Amy and Miss Archer, you know."

Penelope ignored this flippant statement and once more appealed to Julien to get ready, but Mrs. Crozier intervened.

"Leave the poor child alone and let her enjoy herself, do," she said. "If you must go out yourself, then go, though I've heard nothing of it, I'm sure. It seems to me most inconsiderate, but there, you will have

your own way, I suppose. Where were you going, Julien my dear? You didn't mention it, did you?"

"I'm afraid I'd forgotten all about it," confessed Julien embarrassed. "Where were we going, Pen?"

"Well, it was all on your account," said Penelope ungraciously, "you said you wanted to have lunch at the Cheshire Cheese, and we can't go putting off things day after day like this. It will be winter directly."

"But the Cheese won't run away in the winter," remarked Mr. McMorris, and Penelope exclaimed indignantly:

"Don't be vulgar!"

"And I was about to mention that I really came along to bring you two tickets for Theckla this afternoon. A chap I know passed them on to me and this will be Miss Archer's last chance of hearing her."

"I *detest* Theckla," pronounced Penelope as though that settled the matter."

"Oh my dear, you shouldn't say that. I daresay she may be quite a good woman, although she is an actress."

"*Actress*! Really Mamma! Theckla is a singer."

Penelope said this with as much emphasis as if the lady in question had been an elephant or a polar bear, but Mrs. Crozier was not impressed.

"Well, my dear, she may be quite a nice woman for all that," she declared triumphantly. "As for this cheese you are so anxious to taste, it's really very odd of you. If anyone can show me better cheese than we get from Bilson's, in the High Street, I shall be very much surprised, and at a most reasonable price too, as I often tell your father."

"The Cheshire Cheese," said Penelope in her most patient tone, "is an historic place where a great many celebrated people——"

"Used to have larks," interrupted McMorris. "Yes they did, Penelope, honour bright. They had 'em in pies."

"Dear, dear, did you ever now? Poor little things!" exclaimed Mrs. Crozier. "And if you don't like Theckla,

Penelope, George and Julien can go and then we shall all be satisfied. You mustn't count on me, my dear boy, because I must have my little nap after luncheon, or I am too stupid for anything, and then your uncle is so fidgety. So that is nicely settled, isn't it ? "

" Rather," said Mr. McMorris with gusto.

Penelope flung herself out of the room and tramped indignantly upstairs. She hardly spoke all luncheon.

Julien as usual found herself the unhappy pawn in the game. She was quite willing to give up the concert, but that would have upset Mrs. Crozier, probably started the argument all over again and certainly been ungracious to McMorris. At the same time her going was bound to incense Penelope to the last degree.

" Are you quite sure you wouldn't like to come too," she appealed to her in a vain attempt to smooth out the difficulty, and Penelope answered: " No *thank* you," with an emphasis not to be mistaken. Her tone clearly said that this was the last straw.

III

Julien was glad to get out of the house, glad too although she hardly realised it, of McMorris's friendly company, which seemed reassuring in the sudden fit of aloneness that assailed her. He made no reference to Penelope or the morning's argument, but set himself to be entertaining, and Julien was grateful for a delicacy which could so realise the awkwardness of her position. Once in the taxi, scudding down Kensington Road, with a little wind in their faces and the green line of the park flying by, her spirits rose again, and she turned to the young man smiling, a glow of warm colour in the cheeks beneath her pretty hat.

" Isn't this heavenly ? " she said.

The young man smiled at the naivete of the exclamation, instantly conscious that in almost every other girl he had known it would have been a warning signal to him to beware. It was a relief to realise

that in this case any such caution was unnecessary, and perhaps remotely sensing what Penelope's mischievous mind had been at, he felt indignantly anxious to make it up to this jolly little girl who was really so many miles removed from his acid cousin's petty and vulgar suspicions.

"By Jove, I should like to show you London," he said. "It's a ripping place when you really know it and are not just on polite, bowing terms with it like most people. They make me tired, live in Mayfair and patronise Hyde Park and Bond Street, or live in the suburbs and go shopping in Oxford Street and Westbourne Grove, and strolling in Kensington Gardens, and then they flatter themselves they know London. Poor old London, she's a genius unappreciated by her family, a beauty too, but if you say that, the fools think you're crazy. It's a convention to believe London is a dull old hole, chiefly notable because she has a season. As if she hadn't four, bless her, four of the best. She's a cute old girl too and hides some of her best points in the oddest holes and corners. If you're keen on old places, Miss Archer, I could show you some that would knock Penelope and her Cheshire Cheese into a cocked hat—old buildings, you know. They say there was a time when almost every building in London was perfect Gothic. I'd give something to have seen it."

"I'm just beginning to know a Gothic building from a haystack," admitted Julien. "You see I am a tourist and have a guide-book, but I keep it as dark as possible. It seems to be considered rather ill-bred to stare even at a building in London."

It is possible that McMorris divined a good deal more than she expected him to do from this carefully non-committal statement, for he said in the same tone:

"You see, the trouble is that some people have such beastly suburban minds, so you mustn't take them too seriously. As a matter of fact London is the most impersonal spot I know. If I were to turn a somersault here in the middle of Oxford Street people would simply think I was hard up and throw me a few coppers.

And if you were to walk down the Strand eating a German sausage, they'd only say: 'Poor girl! She must be hungry.' But if either of us tried it in Tarrant Square, by Jove they'd be off for the police in two jiffs. There's the difference."

Julien laughed, but she veered off Tarrant Square with some haste.

"I'm so glad I know," she said. "Now I shall sit in the gutter at Westminster for a whole hour and gaze at the Houses of Parliament. They are such a beautiful shape."

IV

In spite of the lateness of the season the Queen's Hall was well filled, for this was the great artist's last appearance before a long tour in the United States and Australia. Julien found herself moving with the sense of excitement that always thrilled her in a crowd, through the thronged vestibule, down wide stairs and into the stalls. It was not a fashionable audience—the true concert audience rarely is—and even in the best seats there were shabby gowns and hats not born of the latest millinery dictum. But everywhere the faces were alive and eager. Some were middle-aged with deep lines worked in by the brush of hard experience—no modern impressionist artist. There were young students too, unmistakable in their expectant attitude, ready with criticisms and comparison, exchanging the gossip of the music schools. Nearly all had high aspirations, nearly all were secretly sure of their ability to stand one day where the great Theckla would presently stand and sway a greater audience. The orchestra had come in, the low-hung, pink-shaded electric lights shone upon the moving crowd of figures among their shining instruments. Looking down upon them and upon the tiers of faces in circle and gallery, and the long symmetrical lines of the stalls, Wagner and Bach, Brahms and Beethoven, and the rest of that great company of the most curious art in the world, smiled from their laurel-wreathed medallions.

Julien, gazing round upon it all, exclaimed to McMorris:

"Oh, this is what I like, better than all the old buildings in the world. It's the people! How alive they are. They look as if they all do things and want to do them, and there is something exciting in that, as though the world were tearing along. It's—it's rather like having the wind in your face."

McMorris, looking down at the slender, graceful young figure, said after a moment:

"But most girls like the wind behind them. Miss Archer, I don't believe you are a girl. You're a spirit and you'll go and disappear before my very eyes."

"No fear," Julien assured him twinkling. Then, before she could stop herself, she added: "But I believe Pen is beginning to wish I would."

There was a sudden stir and a riot of applause as Theckla appeared, a little stout, no longer young, but still exuding the imperious personality that had swayed the world for twenty years. Everyone knew the great singer's story, the early sets-back, the cold discouragement of the big men who had afterwards come to fawn upon her. It had inspired how many young aspirants since, and Julien, remembering it now with a kind of awe, sat tense through the long programme, spell-bound at the wonder of this triumphant woman, who had once been just a struggling girl, poor and unknown.

McMorris for once paid little attention to Theckla or anybody else. He was convinced, since Julien had at last made that involuntary confidence about Penelope after so carefully avoiding it all the afternoon, that things must have been worse than he suspected at Tarrant Square. That sort of thing was disgusting in the family, and he determined to speak to Ida about it and see if she couldn't put out a restraining hand to Penelope. This was not the first time, since he had decided he might one day marry Ida Standish, that he had found occasion to realise how useful such an entirely normal young woman might be about the place.

When the interval came he asked Julien:

"Do you expect to be long with the Croziers, Miss Archer? You see I am sure you will vanish. That's just one of the things that happen in this nasty world."

Julien laughed, her eyes fixed absently on a woman who sat five or six rows ahead of them quite alone. She was very well dressed, and the angle of her pretty hat and the soft lines of her gown attracted the girl's gaze as inanimate things so often did while she was half unconscious of it.

"Oh I shall certainly have to leave them soon," she said, on an impulse voicing a thought that had been in the back of her mind for days. "It has been tremendously good of them to put up with me for so long, and there are other friends who will be expecting me. I am to spend the winter at Hampstead with the Cliffes, who are abroad just now; and there are Olive and Harry Curtis with whom I travelled over. They have been in the North of England, but are just back in London, and looking for a flat, where there is to be a room for me. In February or March I expect to sail for home."

McMorris said suddenly: "I should like to go to Australia. After all it isn't far nowadays."

"How nice of you to say that. And of course it isn't. It is quite a short journey, but most people in England speak of it as though Australia were a tiny island miles beyond the South Pole. Do come, Mr. McMorris, and you can stay with us as long as you like. Just send a note when you think of coming and we'll expect you."

"If you're not careful I shall be tempted to take you at your word."

"But I mean it. Did you think I was joking?"

"Your mater probably would if a strange young man wrote and said he was coming by the next steamer to stay with her indefinitely."

"Not at all. She'd say—'George McMorris? Why of course, he took Julien to concerts and things in London, or is he the nice boy she went ashore with at

Colombo? Anyway we must give him a really good time.'"

They laughed.

"Are there many mothers of that kind knocking about Australia?" enquired McMorris eagerly.

"Millions," said Julien with a cheerful disregard for mere statistics, "All Australian parents are beautifully brought up."

"Oh but there isn't really another in the whole world like mine," she added with a sudden and serious conviction. "That's why I'm infantile enough to be homesick sometimes, even though I am emancipated, according to Penelope."

"Penelope is about twenty years behind the times, and she's talking through her hat the jargon of the last century. You emancipated indeed? You're long past that. Your mother might have been," declared McMorris, "probably was in fact and so was mine. All the really well brought up parents were rebels in their youth."

"No, mine is an exception," said Julien gaily. "I refuse to have her herded with the crowd like that, and she's no more a rebel than I am. I've never had anything to rebel against."

Again her eyes had turned subconsciously to the woman in front of them, but her thoughts had veered back to the night of the election with a little shock, and to other matters, apparently of small importance, but now alive and significant within her.

"After all I don't know," she said. "I was not thinking of my own real mother who died when I was very small. Was this perhaps an inspiration, an illuminating picture of the fascinating and shadowy Elizabeth? I shouldn't wonder if she was a rebel," she said with sudden conviction.

At the same moment the woman in front turned her head a little.

"Why, it's Mrs. Cowle," exclaimed Julien, and for the remainder of the concert thought no more of rebels or anything else in the pleasant prospect of seeing her again.

At the end of the performance Frances Cowle, going rather wearily out, heard the girl's voice and instantly knew that it was the sweetest music she had listened to for months.

" Why, it is my model secretary ! " she said smiling, " and Mr. McMorris. How are you both ? Ah, my dear child, you have spoiled me for mere ordinary secretaries for ever, I'm afraid. I have been raging at one of them all the morning and came here to be soothed. Theckla always soothes me, not so much her singing as the fact that she got to the top of the tree in spite of everybody."

" Another rebel," observed McMorris to Julien, " but no, I forgot. One is only a rebel when one does not succeed."

" Naturally," said Mrs. Cowle, " why rebel any longer when you have found the thing you want—success."

" Success isn't always the thing we want."

" Oh yes it is. Success of one kind or another, though I'm none too sure we ever find it. But dear me, we can't continue this interesting metaphysical discussion in the vestibule of the Queen's Hall. Suppose you young people let me drive you home ? "

McMorris, having other plans, declined this offer and Mrs. Cowle took her leave of them. But she held Julien's hand a moment and said impulsively :

" I should like you to come and see me one day. I wonder if you would."

Julien was delighted and wrote down her address, but as they emerged into the darkening street, she saw Mrs. Cowle's car drive off and disappear with its solitary passenger, and she looked after it with sudden wistfulness. Throughout tea, which she and McMorris had together in a quiet restaurant, the picture of this lonely figure came back to fill her with a vague unrest. It was so alien somehow to one's natural idea of the celebrity.

CHAPTER IX

TONY—SOCIALIST

' They smiled when he winked and addressed them as ' dears '
And they all of them vowed as they dried up their tears,
A pleasanter gentleman never was seen."

W. S. Gilbert.

I

JULIEN, returning to Tarrant Square, found the house in a commotion, the reason being that Mr. Crozier had decided to leave for Edinburgh by the night express, and half the household was rushing about to bring him various unnecessary things and generally make ready. He was a man who, when he was at home, liked to be the pivot about which the whole household moved. He was for ever ringing bells on the most flimsy pretext, and sending his wife and Penelope and the servants on errands of no earthly importance in a great hurry. On this occasion he expected to be away at least a fortnight, and Mrs. Crozier confided the news to Julien with an air of secret pleasure that astounded the girl.

Next day the reason became clear with the tempestuous arrival of the son of the house. Although Mr. Crozier was away from Tarrant Square almost every day, he had a habit of returning suddenly, descending like a whirlwind upon his family and expecting its instant attention. It was not considered safe for Tony to come home in these circumstances, unless his father was well out of range, but that happy consummation having been achieved, an instant summons flew to him from his mother.

It seemed to Julien that the whole family could not have gone more completely or determinedly upon its own individual way, each without the slightest regard to the feelings or inclinations of the others, and she

felt interested in Tony, not only as the mystery of the household, for so in some exaggerated way the rest of them made him seem to be, but because he at least had cut adrift and got away from it all.

She was made aware of his presence at first by the expression of Penelope when, the two girls having been in town all the morning, the doors of Tarrant Square opened to receive them. Penelope had been cold and aloof since the affair of yesterday, but now she forgot that pose and turned to Julien, exclaiming:

"I knew it. Tony, of course! Directly father is out of the house mamma encourages him to come home."

(She always spoke of "Father" and "Mamma" as though in subtle qualification of her regard—or disregard—for them.)

"Well, anyway *we* don't want to see him, so let us hurry upstairs," she added.

The occasion for this outburst had been a sudden shout of laughter from the drawing-room, and as Julien followed Penelope upstairs, she stole a secret look in that direction with interest. At the same moment the door opened and a boyish voice remarked:

"Oh! hang Penelope and her beastly friend! You and I are going to have this little spree on our own, Mater."

Then the owner of the voice came out into the hall, caught Julien's eye and stopped short with a soft whistle of consternation. For a second they looked at each other, Julien twinkling, Tony with a grin. Then she ran on rather hastily after Penelope, who was already upstairs and had missed the little encounter. Julien was glad of that, and kept rigid silence regarding it.

"We'll stay up here," declared Penelope. "You don't want to see him, do you?"

And Julien said: "Oh, of course, I don't mind in the least," adding to herself in a sudden flash of inspiration: "I'm becoming a secret little cat."

After a while she said:

"I suppose he'll be going soon. Where does he live?"

"Oh, he won't go while father's away, you may be

sure. Still we needn't see much of him. He lives at Notting Hill, or some dreadful place like that."

"Why dreadful, Pen?"

"Tony is a *Socialist!*"

Penelope evidently expected this announcement to explain everything, but Julien merely said in great astonishment:

"Good gracious! he doesn't look like it."

"Where have you seen him?" The enquiry was distinctly sharp, and Julien was not a little shocked to find herself evading it.

"Your mother showed me his photograph. I thought him a little like Mr. McMorris."

"Humph!" said Penelope with deep scorn. That was the final indictment of her opinion.

"You can understand how we feel it," she said, "his being a Socialist I mean. It's perfectly dreadful and I did try to prevent his coming here while you were with us. However, I'll see that you don't have to talk to him."

"Pen, you speak as though he were a criminal of the deepest dye," said Julien, but she made no protest against Penelope's plans to keep Tony at arm's length, having learnt wisdom in her five months' experience of that damsel. The most innocent protest in the world, heated in the fiery furnace of Penelope's suspicion, was wont to show the basest metal. Besides she had a feeling that in that direction events—and Tony—would take care of themselves.

In fact if Penelope had hoped to shock her guest by the story of Tony's outrageous views, she was doomed to disappointment, for the girl, in spite of being reared in the stress of party politics, had managed to keep a liberal mind, probably through the humorous quiet influence of her stepmother, who had been more and more the secret, guiding spirit where Julien was concerned. The girl had met many of her father's opponents . . . they were her nearest experience to the "Socialist" of Penelope's scornful declaration, but they were certainly nothing like her brief glimpse of the

erring Tony. The figure of the young man, smiling immaculate and debonair, standing in the hall below, came back to mock her in its very delightful inconsequence. If this were the real article, she decided, it might be a distinctly amusing experience.

It was.

Tony Crozier was one of those fortunate people who are born with personality, which really means that, deserving or undeserving, they are always the centre of any stage they happen to occupy at the moment. Tony indeed was not only the centre but the entire platform. He was a beaming, boyish-looking person, rather like a large schoolboy, who rioted noisily about the house to the infinite entertainment of his mother and the servants —and the scornful disgust of Penelope. A general favourite and clearly used to the position, he domineered over everybody, but always with the same air of a spoilt child who knows its privileges.

"Why isn't Miss Archer sitting next to me?" he demanded in an injured tone as they took their places at dinner. "If she doesn't I shall lose my appetite, and I really can't afford a new one just at present. Mother, make Miss Archer sit beside me and hold my hand."

"Tony, don't bring any of your Socialist manners here," requested his sister.

Julien chuckled.

"Do Socialists hold hands?" she enquired innocently, and Tony replied:

"Oh, always! Please come and be a Socialist, Miss Archer."

He tilted Penelope's chair up, lifted that outraged damsel into the next and offered the discarded seat to Julien with a stage bow.

"Now we're all comfortable," he said pleasantly, "and if you're good little girls the Mater and I will take you to the theatre after dinner."

"Oh, will you? Of course you needn't consult us," said Penelope with scorn. "Do you suppose Miss Archer and I have nothing to do but tear about London for your amusement?"

"I've taken stalls at the Savoy," continued Tony placidly. "I wanted to take you to the comic opera at Covent Garden but there were no seats. Now that is a riotous show if you like. I went last week and the play's about an old joker named Tannhauser who shrieked a duet for three-quarters of an hour with a large and aged bird called Mrs. Venus, while dissolving views went on behind. From what I could make out Mrs. V. was proposing to old Tannhauser and showing him moving pictures of her country estates as an inducement to matrimony. Then the idiot's best girl got annoyed about it, and the County said unpleasant things, and Elizabeth—that's the girl you know—was so catty to poor old Tannhauser that he got in a nasty temper and lay on the floor and kicked. Then he thought he'd better go and shoot lions till she recovered, but I'm blest if the very day he came back with his bag, that pesky girl didn't go and die of appendicitis or something. So I suppose Mrs. Venus won the rubber after all."

"It must be a very silly sort of play," declared Penelope. "You needn't take us to any rubbish of that kind, thank you."

"Oh dear no. The show to-night is by a chap who used to write under the name of Shakespeare, since dead I understand. Thought your pressing engagements would disappear when you knew they were stall tickets, Penelope. Why, if you're very careful you may rub shoulders with a belted earl. I suppose you know my sister is one of the earl-y birds, Miss Archer, and she has a positively bovine affection for the stalls."

"Don't be vulgar, Tony. It isn't at all clever to make silly puns."

"Of course not. It's dead easy, but everybody knows the pun is mightier than the sword."

"I suppose you mean the pen," said Penelope.

II

They went to the theatre that night. They went to various other entertainments of Tony's choosing during

the week that followed, for it transpired that even Penelope was unable to gainsay the despised and Socialist Tony when it came to matters of this kind. As for Julien she had no wish to gainsay him for she thought him quite the most delightful person she had ever met.

Julien Archer knew nothing of love, that comparative, superlative but never positive emotion. She would certainly have scorned the idea that she was in love with Tony Crozier, nor had her attitude regarding him that instinctive secrecy which women use as a weapon on such occasions. But she was nevertheless dimly aware that she liked him in a new way, a way that was somehow exciting and swallowed up very effectually her recent attack of homesickness. Tony's foolish conversation delighted her, his mere presence in the same room gave her a sense of pleasure that she could not analyse, except that when he was there, she was conscious that nothing else, nobody else mattered in the least.

McMorris came in on Sunday afternoon, but Julien discovered afterwards that his visit had made absolutely no impression on her mind. She could not remember having said more than half a dozen words to him, but she did notice he and Tony were not really alike after all. Tony was far better-looking. The two young men had not met before but their attitude was perfectly cordial. Tony it appeared knew something of the other man's work and was gracefully respectful about it.

Julien learned little by little, during the week, of Tony's own work, or rather, for the work itself seemed nebulous enough, the aspects of life for which he stood, and it seemed to her the most illuminating experience she had ever known. She knew nothing of Socialism, which she vaguely supposed to be a movement excellent in theory, but, in practice and its relation to modern life, surely a little wild. There was nothing wild as Tony expounded it however, and it struck a spark of emotion and speculation that set her mind aflame. He told her of the sweated workers and the slum dwellers of London and the big provincial towns. He spoke with

breezy vigour and a wealth of statistical detail and personal anecdote that carried conviction, because it had all the air of being unrehearsed. The story would have been threadbare to most people, but Julien's mind was virgin soil in this particular, her temperament the obvious tinder to be fired by the tragic story of conditions at which hitherto she had not even guessed. Tony had indeed found a new and promising disciple, and wasn't he good at that? It was indeed part of his profession, and he welcomed this latest conquest with open and most flattering delight. About his own work meanwhile he seemed to Julien refreshingly modest. She gathered that he was secretary of some society whose name had no significance for her, and that he had spoken a good deal in public all over England. That he was, through his father, a martyr to his convictions, naturally added to his virtues in her sight, though it must be admitted he was far from posing as a victim. He did not mention his home connection in any way, and Julien's conjectures on this head were all gathered from the vague hints of his mother and Penelope. Penelope during these days was curiously quiet. If Julien had been in a normal mood she might have found this ominous, but as it was she hardly noticed it.

"I believe you like men," Penelope accused her one day.

"Of course I do," said Julien surprised and not in the least realising that this would be considered a damning and thoroughly improper admission.

Penelope was nearly always present when she talked to Tony, but that was natural enough. She had developed a habit of looking at them in a secret, almost vindictive way.

"Poor Penelope is frightfully bored," exclaimed Julien once.

"Not at all," replied Penelope with unpleasant emphasis, "you are both extremely entertaining."

One morning Tony brought her some Socialist papers to read.

" I'd take 'em to my room if I were you," he said, " where you can read and look at them in peace."

" Penelope has gone out so I can browse all the morning."

" Has she ? By Jove then, why shouldn't you come out with me ? I've got to go down Whitchapel way on business, and it would be a good chance to show you a bit of the East End. You ought to see how the other half lives while you're in London, you know, it's an experience, and Pen would never come. She doesn't think poverty is quite respectable. Neither is it to the people who're responsible, the slackers like her. But since she's safely out of the way the mice—that's us—can play. Go along and get your things on. The dear old Mater won't mind in the least."

Julien, delighted at the idea, hastened upstairs to get ready. A few moments later she invaded Mrs. Crozier's room and found her deep in one of her letters to a friend she had not seen for fifteen years. Her face was alight with the pleasure this harmless recreation always gave her, and she greeted Julien with a little absent smile.

" Well, my dear, you find me up to my eyes in correspondence as usual," she told her in a tone of confidential importance.

" I'm so glad," said Julien, " because Tony is going to take me into the slums as Penelope is out, and now I shall know I am not disturbing you. Tony is such a brick, for you know I have been longing to see the East End."

" *Isn't* he a dear fellow ? " agreed Tony's mother delighted. "Ah ! I knew you'd like him, my dear, and so I've told Penelope. And so unselfish too, that's the comfort. There are not many boys like my Tony, I assure you. He was always a far better daughter to me than Penelope, and I've wished many times he really were a girl. You'll bring him home if it rains, won't you ? He is such a careless boy about his health."

" Yes, I'll take care of him, Mrs. Crozier," promised Julien, and found herself strangely pleased at the prospect of doing so.

III

It was nearly six when the two returned, Julien tired out but eagerly full of her experiences and of Tony's virtues as a guide. Tony himself was as tempestuous as usual, and having taken an hilarious farewell of her for the moment, rushed off for a bath, whistling at the top of his voice. Apart from this the house was very quiet, and Julien saw no one on her way upstairs. She knocked at Penelope's door but there was no answer. "She must be out," she told herself and went to find her hostess.

Mrs. Crozier was sitting by the fire in her room, and as Julien went in she rose in agitation, presenting a tearful face to the astonished girl.

"Oh! there you are at last, my dear," she exclaimed, "I have been worried to death about you."

"Dear Mrs. Crozier, I am so sorry," said Julien. "Did you think we were lost? Tony took the greatest care of me."

"The dear fellow! I knew he would. There is no one in the world like my Tony, and as I told Penelope, you'd be as safe as safe with him, whatever your father might think."

"*My father?*" exclaimed Julien in open-eyed amazement. Mrs. Crozier's tone had been querulously indignant, and the girl felt bewildered.

"Oh! it appears he will be in a pretty state about it," she continued in the same tone, "such a rigid Conservative as he is. And dear me, I'm sure I don't know what to do. First it's all the fuss and bother about George McMorris, and now it's Tony and you and he going out unchaperoned, and Penelope raving at me for allowing it. Your father will be in a pretty state about it, she says, though I never did hold with such nonsense myself, and I'm sure Tony's the best boy in the world. But there, men are like that and I know there'd be no end of a fuss if Penelope's father thought she so much as looked at a Socialist. If anything came of it, Penelope

says I should be blamed, though I'm sure it's little enough I see of the dear boy, except when his father's out of the house, and surely I may be allowed to have him at home for a little holiday then.

Julien listened to this rambling and tearful protest in silence and for all its wildness she was quite aware that there was a note of hostility in the usual kind voice which showed her Penelope's shafts had been well aimed. So well aimed were they indeed that Mrs. Crozier, from having been the merely worried hostess, had become the indignant mamma up in arms against all designing hussies in general, and one in particular. But Julien, not having met such a situation before, could only vaguely conjecture this, and while her cheeks burned at the thought, she told herself it was too preposterous to be true.

"Penelope is quite mistaken," she said, when at last she had a chance to speak. "Father isn't so absurdly narrow-minded as all that, and he expects me to form my own views about things. As for my going out with Tony, father wouldn't mind that in the least, as long as you approved, Mrs. Crozier. Why should he? It would be too absurd!"

"That's exactly what I said to Penelope," declared Mrs. Crozier with satisfaction. "Not that I should like to say anything against your father, my dear, I'm sure. No doubt he's a very worthy man, but when it comes to his objecting to have you go out with my son, as Penelope assures me he would, then I say it's absurd."

"Please don't believe anything of the kind, Mrs. Crozier," said Julien eagerly. "Of course I'm sorry Pen should resent my having gone, and more sorry she should have upset you about it. However I won't go on worrying you like this, because you have been awfully good to put up with me for so long. And in any case my friends, the Curtises, are expecting me to join them. I've been thinking I ought to go on Monday."

"Oh my dear, it's been a pleasure to have you in the house, I'm sure. But then I never did hold with quarrelling. What the young people of to-day are

coming to I don't know. I suppose it's this modern education and all the nonsense about votes, but if you don't get on, then it's better to part and be done with it, as I tell Penelope."

"Much better of course." Julien smiled at her and added: "I suppose I had better go and dress or Pen will think I am still being corrupted by Tony's Socialism."

"Oh my dear," exclaimed Tony's mother shocked: "I'm sure the dear fellow wouldn't corrupt anyone."

Dinner that night was not an exhilarating function. Mrs. Crozier pleaded a headache and did not come down. Penelope talked a great deal about a mysterious entertainment to which she had taken a mysterious and unnamed friend because Julien was not forthcoming. Tony, oblivious of clouds on the sky and blissfully ignorant of feline tempers, larked as usual, while Julien gurgled an accompaniment to his weakest jokes, and fondly hoped she did not seem hysterical.

After dinner he proceeded to monopolise her as usual while Penelope sat and looked at them without speaking.

By and by the letters came and Julien seizing the excuse that one of hers must be answered, said good night and went upstairs. The note in question was from Mrs. Cowle, asking her to spend Friday afternoon with her at Lavender Gardens.

"I suppose that will be another grievance," she thought, but was not greatly disturbed on that account. She had reached a state of desperation where Penelope's feelings had ceased to matter in the least.

CHAPTER X

REVOLT

"A blight, a gloom, I know not what, has crept upon my gladness,
Some vague, remote ancestral touch of sorrow or of madness."
Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

I

SINCE their return to London from the North a few weeks before, Julien had seen nothing of Olive and Harry Curtis, a series of small accidents having prevented their meeting. The two girls had planned on the way over many excursions together in London, but Harry's immediate departure for the North had upset all this. One plan had remained. Julien was to help choose their flat on their return, and without fail there was to be a spare room which she could use whenever she felt inclined.

It appeared, however, that when they did reach London, they were in such a hurry to find quarters that there was no time to wait for Julien's aid, and Olive had written a hurried note of explanation, saying that as soon as they were settled Julien must come over and see them at once. No more definite summons had yet arrived, but Julien thought nothing of that and next morning set off for their address in Hyde Park.

"If they haven't a room for me, they will have to let me sleep in the coal cellar," she decided, thankful that here at least she need not stand on ceremony, and determined to leave Tarrant Square at all costs.

She had had a wretched night, but as she walked swiftly through the misty avenues of Kensington Gardens, where the gold leaves fluttered and ran before her, and the keen air touched her cheeks, a new sense of security stole over her. Harry and Olive were her own people,

and since she could go to them she was not after all so utterly alien and alone, as these last hours had made her seem to be. She had spent a night of hard revolt; she was desperately homesick with a weary feeling of disgust for Penelope and all her kind, and the thought of friendly Australian voices and understanding Australian hearts seemed to her, at that moment, the one compensation in an unprofitable world.

The flat was not difficult to find and she was soon grasping the miniature knocker on which a particularly evil-looking ghoul appeared to be turning a perpetual somersault.

She had to knock three times before there was an answer. Then Olive herself appeared, Olive a little wild-haired as usual, with cheeks aflame and eyes that looked for a second undeniably startled.

"Oh hullo, Julien," she exclaimed in such an audible tone that Julien stared, "come to see the shanty? Good for you. Don't fall over the coal scuttle and break your neck, will you, because funerals are expensive. This ancestral hall is not as light as it might be and I'm head cook and coal-heaver, which accounts for much, including dust-pans on the chiffonier and Harry's boots in the sink. Come and take your hat off. Of course you're staying to lunch?"

Still talking at the top of her voice she ushered Julien into the tiny bedroom, carefully standing with her back to the light.

"Oh, Olive?" said Julien, "I'm simply pining for a good old talk. You don't know how jolly it is to see you again."

"Right," said Olive, we'll talk the cat's hind leg off in a minute, but first you must come and see the mansion and then you'll have to sit on the mantelpiece or the gas bracket while I get lunch. Our kitchen doesn't run to easy chairs."

She drew Julien out into the little hall and began rather feverishly opening doors and proclaiming the character of rooms and cupboards behind.

"This is what the agent called the reception room—

think he meant de-ception! Here's the dining-room, or as Harry calls it the cellarmanger, after the French you know, because he says it is a cross between the two. Here's the pantry-dairy-safe-boxroom, guaranteed one foot square at least. The bath-room is mostly inhabited by a fireplace in case we should care to have afternoon tea there for a change."

One door remained closed.

"That's Harry's workshop," Olive rather hastily explained. "He had to have the one decent-sized room to make his infernal machines and things. Julien, don't you ever marry a genius."

Julien laughed and Olive added in hasty correction:

"Because of course you could never find one as nice as Harry if you tried till doomsday, and without the niceness. Here's the kitchen. Will you come and look on at my efforts?"

"Harry out?" enquired Julien perching on the edge of the little kitchen table.

"Oh dear no. He's working away in there but I can't disturb him till lunch time, mustn't you know, might blow us all up, or wreck some marvellous idea for sending coal by telephone. You have to be so jolly careful."

It seemed to Julien that she spoke almost defiantly, and the girl forgot her own dismays in the contemplation of the signs of trouble here. Olive with her wild talk and that unmistakable look in her eyes! She awaited Harry's appearance with some impatience, while she talked to Olive of unimportant things.

II

Luncheon ready, Olive banged on the closed door, and after five minutes Harry appeared. Julien noticed with satisfaction that he looked harassed too, for she was sure he was responsible for any trouble there might be. He seemed genuinely glad to see her and broke

all records in the matter of conversation, and that in itself was a bad sign. When Harry was morose and abstracted, it was a sure proof that he was also perfectly happy, and Julien knew enough of him to distrust such affability.

"Olive's working her head off," he told her, "seems to think she's a kind of automatic machine for doing the bally housework, and won't learn sense and get a maid. I wish you'd talk to her, Julien."

"Rot," laughed Olive, her colour flaming, "Harry always thinks I'll melt. You know better, Julien. Besides I don't want a superior English female poking her nose into my flat."

"Oh blow the beastly flat," exclaimed Harry.

"Yes, that's exactly what I'm expecting you to do at any moment, blow it up," said Olive laughing her unnatural laugh.

Altogether Julien felt relieved when the meal was over and Harry had departed into his den again, for the tense atmosphere and the sudden lack of ease where she had expected something absolutely different, was very trying, coming as it did on the heel of her own perplexities. It was evident there was no room for a third person in this ménage at present, especially a third person who was also an old friend and therefore to be avoided at all costs. Julien, remembering Olive's particularly fiery spirit, could easily understand that the very fact of her having known the Curtises all her life was an argument against her at the moment, and at last she went away without having said a word of her own difficulties.

"We haven't your room yet," Olive told her in off-hand apology as she said good-bye, "because Harry had to have the extra room, but he'll be going away for a few weeks soon and then you must come and stay with me and we'll have larks. You *will* come, won't you, Julien?"

The last words were anxious, and Olive's eyes told the same story. Julien, suddenly pitiful, put her arms round her with a little hug.

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"Of course," she said, "whenever you get rid of him or want a little comic relief, just let me know."

But she was worried about them and now utterly at sea regarding her own affairs, she walked wearily back through the gardens, the autumn day very chill and sinister about her. High up against a dun grey sky, the trees were shivering like paupers in the cold, their last thin garment of leaves falling in tatters at their feet. Nursemaids with red noses and heaped up perambulators were everywhere, sometimes reading ragged novelettes, sometimes in cold, vindictive voices, calling little muffled, running children to order. At the Round Pond a few youngsters lingered to watch a solitary white sail lurching on the waters. Through the bare trees the unwieldy outline of the Albert Memorial towered and threatened like a horrible, cheap china ornament, grown gigantic in a nightmare.

The girl shivered and hurried on. For some reason the whole chill atmosphere seemed to her significant of Penelope, that new Penelope whom the night had taught her to despise, with a kind of bitter loathing and distaste. She knew now that Penelope had been hovering in the background with her intolerable hints and suggestions for weeks past, but it was only their final connection with Tony that had made them composite in her sight. While they were aimed at George McMorris she had not troubled or understood. The thing had been clearly too preposterous. But Tony?"

In a white heat of anger and disgust she almost thought she would never look at him again, but immediately she knew Penelope should not have that particular satisfaction. Already Tony stood for something new in her life, new knowledge, new enthusiasm, and the feeling that there was more than this, something indefinite and fine and surely lasting, set her heart thumping and her eyes alight.

She had been homesick, but now she knew quite definitely she did not want to go home, and yet since a haven with Olive and Harry was denied her, where could

she go? Her friends, the Cliffes, were still abroad, and although she knew many casual travellers in England they were certain to have their own plans in which an unattached girl could hardly expect to find a place. The Standishes whom she had liked immensely were also out of the question through their relation to the Croziers, and that disposed of the few people she knew with any degree of intimacy in London. The situation was perplexing enough in all conscience, for with every moment the desire, indeed the urgent necessity, to leave Tarrant Square on Monday became more definite in her mind.

A kind of weary desperation came over her at last. She began to feel worried about her own responsibility in the situation, and to believe that she must have lost her head, behaved wildly with regard to Tony, carelessly at all events, forgetting Penelope's different point of view. And with that came an overwhelming feeling that her whole world was topsy turvy, that everything was going wrong, had been going wrong for months past where she was concerned. To begin with there had been the matter of her father, and the long hard nights of her rebellion returned to her in a rush of sickening recollection. After all what had it meant except her own powerlessness, her own inadequacy? And here again in the Crozier household she was the centre of revolt, of secret denunciation, and powerless against that. These past months in England resolved themselves suddenly into a time of drifting and inaction, in which there had been nothing worth while, nothing really alive, only a dim, vague web of ill-feeling and suspicion closing her in.

All this consciousness of revolt, a clear heritage from the shadowy Elizabeth, was so new to her only because there had been hitherto about her eager, confident youth, the invincible guard of a great affection. With some dim knowledge of this she wanted her mother now, longed for her arms about her and the warm tenderness of her voice.

She had been wandering rather vaguely about the

Gardens, had taken the wrong path and gone a little wildly back in search of some familiar landmark, and now she found herself in that space between the long lines of trees, where Watts' statue of Nervous Energy stands up triumphant. This great creature of stone, every tendon strung to the utmost, every nerve afire, caught and held her with a swift relief. Here, statue or not, life, movement, action were symbolised. That was what she needed, to be in the thick of it again.

Then like a clear call came back the things that Tony had tried to show her, and she knew that already he and she had more than one common meeting ground where Penelope's eagle eye could be upon them.

III

She hurried home, and, just in time for tea, found George McMorris there with Ida Standish. It was by way of being something of a rescue party on her behalf, the result of McMorris' cogitations at the concert, but of course she did not guess that, and in any case Penelope's sudden and disarming amiability rather upset the young man's calculations. The fact was that Ida's presence was always soothing. She was moreover to Penelope a kind of scintillating visitant from the real world of her rather vague conceptions. Ida, who went to Court and even thought that glorious proceeding dull, Ida whose grace and ease of manner had always been a source of secret envy and admiration to the younger girl! She saw in them the result of Birth and Breeding, and the other high gods of her private worship, whereas they were really due to such unromantic attributes as a placid temper and a kind heart, things which Providence often sees fit to give for some curious reason to people of no social standing whatever. (Penelope could have given Providence some tips on this subject.)

There were no confidences between these two. Ida was too exalted in Penelope's sight for that. She

thought with a strange mixture of rage and pride that it was very condescending of Ida to come to Tarrant Square, considering all things—the all things of course implying her mother—but Ida would have been utterly astounded at such an idea. It never occurred to her to think of people's pedigrees, and she liked her aunt and was vaguely sorry for her though she did not quite know why. The Croziers were part of the family and that was sufficient. She had the thoroughly English clannishness without that individual spite that is so often its every day garment.

Ida's visit then was fortunate. Penelope became affable even to George McMorris, and to Julien she could not have been sweeter. Behind it she was perhaps a little anxious, for after all she did not wish to lose her friend.

Ida looking on was so much deceived by the amicable atmosphere that she thought George had been drawing on a fertile imagination, and she said to him going home:

"George, you're a fraud. Why, Julien was as jolly as a sand-boy, and I'm sure Penelope has not been treating her badly."

McMorris shook his head at her.

"I'm disappointed in you," he said, "I thought you had more soul. Why, you old dunderhead, you didn't expect the girl to have a black eye or a broken nose, did you? Our dear Penelope's blows are of the subtle invisible kind. She gives you a thump in the self-respect, batters in your pride with a dirty left, then uses you as a battering ram to biff the other fellow. I hope these classic phrases are not too much for your young and uncultivated ears."

"But Pen was perfectly sweet to her all the afternoon and I believe she is very fond of her," declared Ida unmoved.

"Rot! also rodents!" McMorris glanced at her sideways, a satisfied, proprietary glance, for Ida was always a rather delicately charming picture although she *was* thirty and unmarried—at present.

" You know her and I don't," he said aggressively, " and of course the little cat was on her best behaviour because you were there. Tell you what, Ida, Penelope will forget herself one of these days and bob to you like the village kids in properly brought up neighbourhoods (not the pampered infants at Fields of course). When you appear she always seems to see a row or so of dukes in the background, nice respectable dukes with their coronets on straight, and stars and stripes—or is it garters ?—across their august chests."

" George dear, it sounds like an advertisement for somebody's whisky," protested Ida, " I hope you haven't been—"

" Oh of course if you're going to be funny," said George, " I shall not marry you. It's a thing I've not been used to in my wives."

Meanwhile Penelope's amiability had not even evaporated with the departure of theso two. At dinner she managed to be civil to Tony who had been out all day with Mrs. Crozier, much to that lady's fond delight, and she pressed Julien to talk of her friends the Curtises, clearly having heard from her mother that she expected to join them in a few days. It was all very well for Julien to go away for the remainder of Tony's visit, but after, Penelope considered, she had the first claim upon her.

" I hope they won't want to monopolise you now they're in London," she said.

" I don't think it's likely," smiled Julien.

" No, indeed, I hope not, I'm sure," said Mrs. Crozier. After this glorious day with her boy she was less inclined to think of Julien as the dangerous siren Penelope had painted, more and more disposed to think her daughter's complaints a cock and bull story. " You must ask them to dinner one night, my dear."

Julien thanked her but did not commit herself either way. She was determined not to mention the change of plan with regard to the Curtises, at least until she had found a satisfactory substitute for it, but that at last was possible. She remembered to have

heard some Australian acquaintances were staying at a private hotel in Lancaster Gate, and she decided to look them up in the morning with the idea of joining their party until the Cliffes returned from abroad.

Tony meanwhile, with all a man's absolute blindness to a situation, took the centre of the stage as usual, and more openly and gladly than she had ever done before, Julien played with him there.

Here was the inevitable answer to Penelope's interference, the answer to all interfering friends. If in matters of the heart the victim's people took care to hang out the sign "Family delighted," half the matches in the world would flutter and die out.

CHAPTER XI

THE GLORIOUS ADVENTURE

" Till she reach me forth her hand,
Saying ' Who but I have the right ? '
And out of a troubled night
Shall draw me safe to the land."

Rudyard Kipling.

I

THE next afternoon Julien paid her promised visit to Mrs. Cowle.

Since the invitation impulsively given at the Queen's Hall, Frances had lived through several periods of doubt before writing to ratify it, for she had not intended to see Julien again and she generally knew her own mind.

After the week at Fields she had spent, to her great dismay, a restless and unprofitable summer. Work evaded her; she was irritable, morose and appallingly lonely. She went abroad at last, but Europe was overrun by tourists with red guide-books, and parties of incredibly friendly and cheerful people mocked her solitary state. She was haunted too by a girl's young, smiling, eager face, and she wanted to see her delight in all the sights and sounds that to herself had suddenly become barren and stale and old.

Going back to London much too early in a hot September did not improve matters. It seemed to her that she had never realised before how solitary her life had been. She had many acquaintances but few friends. Only the Standishes indeed were intimate enough to come to her without a formal summons. This absolute detachment and concentration upon her work had been her own deliberate choice, born in the first place of self-distrust. Now it filled her with a kind

of panic. She wanted to talk continually to keep her thoughts at bay, but the few people she could have called upon to aid her here were still out of London. There were a good many men and women of her own craft she would have liked to know better, she discovered now, but she was shy of making claims in this direction, absurdly doubtful of her right to do so.

She thought at last that she would get a resident secretary who would at least be somebody to talk to, but the difficulty was that nearly everyone she had ever employed in this capacity, irritated her beyond measure. Grown unaccustomed to think of other people's feelings, she was neither an easy nor considerate employer, though it would have astounded her beyond measure to know how harsh and terrifying a figure she cut to most of the girls who served her literary needs. Her late secretary had left without excuse or explanation, and she had been so enraged by that that she had sent out her work ever since, though she found it both troublesome and unsatisfactory.

Then she saw Julien at the Queen's Hall and for ten days fought a losing battle with the conviction that it was madness to let the acquaintance become more intimate.

And yet, to see her just once, here in her own home! After all what harm could it do? None to Julien certainly. Soon she would go home to Australia, and London and all it meant would be left far behind, a little unimportant mile-post of her girlhood. To Frances herself it was sure to bring renewed unrest, but surely it was worth risking. At last she told herself that this should be her final piece of self-indulgence in that direction, and wrote to Julien, spending the days between in feverish preparation for the girl's brief hour with her.

She bought a great many flowers and filled every room with them, shell-pink and palest mauve chrysanthemums, a shallow bowl of violets, carnations in tall Venetian glasses. She had an odd desire to show Julien the house, to know the quality of the things she

cared about. She began to dress absurdly early and changed her mind several times before she was satisfied as to her choice of frocks, eventually wearing a soft, rose-coloured *crepe de chine*. Then she went downstairs and spent a restless, difficult hour of waiting, preparing her armour of indifference which was to be pierced at the very first glance at the girl.

Julien was tired and upset because her excursion to Lancaster Gate had proved unavailing, her friends having left for Ireland two days before, and as she came into the dimness of the drawing-room, her tall slender figure and pale face looked singularly frail and delicate.

Frances, all her resolute defences down, took her hands and drew her into the circle of the firelight.

"My dear child," she said, then dropped the hands a little hurriedly because she was startled at the sound of her own voice, vaguely afraid of herself.

"It was good of you to let me come, Mrs. Cowle," said Julien looking up with a little warm smile that showed how really good it had been, quite a new aspect of the case to Frances.

"On the contrary the goodness is on your side, giving up your amusements to spend a dull afternoon with me. I don't know another girl I should have dared ask to do it."

"Oh," protested Julien, "and just think of the thousands who would simply give their ears to come,"—she added chuckling—"and bring their autograph books behind them."

They laughed at that, intimately together. Julien slipped with a sense of rest into the easy chair, feeling around her the mellow, dim grace of the room, the scent of the violets in their silver bowls behind her, and before, this suddenly kind presence in the rose-coloured gown. Her spirits rose again.

II

They had tea together while the girl was led on to talk of her adventures, and Frances watched her smiling and

sympathetic, calm too with a calmness that surprised her. That early desire to discount any charms that Julien might seem to possess had long ago left her, and to-day she was determined to enjoy her moment. Had she not definitely decided it was to be the last? And yet whenever she spoke she was beset by a feeling that this was all wrong, that she was talking wildly, wasting precious time. A wonderful glow of tenderness came over her and she wanted to express that, yet knew it to be preposterous and impossible. She felt her own voice was harsh, but Julien, quite oblivious, exclaimed impulsively:

"I love your room, Mrs. Cowle. I believe it's the jolliest I have ever seen."

"I'm very fond of it too," admitted Frances smiling her difficult smile, "but then I have seen it grow year by year as I had money and time to give it. To me a house isn't really an inanimate thing. It's alive with a soul and a mind, or sometimes without either. Haven't you ever known an empty-headed, soulless house? Then there is the poor dead house with its eyes shut and forgotten by its friends. I always feel so sorry for it."

"Yes," said Julien, "and the haughty house that has come down in the world and can never afford a new frock and has to take in boarders."

They laughed, Julien gaily, Frances still with her air of hard restraint.

"Would you like to see my house?" she said getting up, and Julien jumped to her feet in ready acquiescence. She thought this tremendously nice of Mrs. Cowle, for, of course, one liked to see the house of a celebrity She was elated at her own good fortune too, because she, an ordinary, unimportant girl, had been given this privilege of a whole afternoon actually alone with her. She had supposed there would be other guests. Frances, with her usual inability to realise herself as a celebrity even in the sense Julien's enthusiastic youth might be liable to regard it, looked into the girl's eager face and thought with triumph: "*She's glad to be here.*"

They passed out of the long drawing-room opening into a miniature conservatory at one end, crossed the hall and found themselves in the dining-room, square and sedate with round polished table, carved, high backed chairs and an old dresser set with blue china. The walls were cream, and heavy blue curtains veiled the windows and barred the way to the room beyond. This was the library and its atmosphere was as seductive as that of the dining-room had been austere. There were deep chairs everywhere filled with cushions, and low book-cases round three sides of the room, their polished tops set with odds and ends of beaten silver, ivory and brass, picked up by Frances from time to time about the world. On the walls were prints of Meredith, George Eliot, Brahms and Garibaldi, some signed photographs and original black and white sketches, a picture of the Statue of Liberty, and a photograph of a literary dinner, her first many years ago, and full of women wearing incredibly large sleeves and high-built hair. Between these at intervals were half a dozen gay, coloured Italian landscapes, very modern and impressionistic and full of sunlight and haunting vistas of shade. At the end of the room was an open fireplace and an old oak settle, and beyond that a writing table with two or three upright chairs.

"I'm glad your books don't live in glass houses," said Julien confidentially to Mrs. Cowle as they finished the tour of the room. The other woman smiled at her with sudden pleasure.

"How well we agree," she said. Then because there had seemed to be too much fervour in that harmless speech, she added lightly: "To be a properly imposing library it should have high bookcases, step-ladders and dust, but somehow I prefer comfort, and the little things I care for around me. I can indulge these fads and fancies, because I live alone."

"I suppose you like that because you have no one to interrupt your work?"

"You don't know how I sometimes wish I had."

Julien looked up in swift surprise and in that moment

she had quite a new impression of Mrs. Cowle. Hitherto she had seen her remotely splendid, wrapped in the dazzling mantle of her reputation and quite removed by these things from little common ills. Now some odd note in her voice set a chord vibrating in the girl's mind. It gave her a new sense of intimacy, almost of pity, although that was clearly absurd and made her feel how chill such a mantle might really be.

As they went on upstairs, Frances a little ahead turned back to wait for her, smiling away her own vehemence.

" In fact I have even thought of trying to get a resident secretary—when I can find one at all who is not a hopeless imbecile," she said.

It occurred to her that her conversation was ridiculously artificial but now that seemed something quite beyond her control as though she were looking on at another person. " And now I am going to show you my den," she said, " or rather my secretary's den when she is not a myth as at present. Usually she and chaos reign here together with the dictionaries and encyclopaedias and other horrible sources of correction, while I am turned loose in the rest of the house."

Julien came in smiling with a little excited colour in her cheeks. An idea had come to her, and now, as she looked round the business-like little room and caught a distracting glimpse of trees and a garden beyond the window, she knew it to have been an inspiration. She turned back to Mrs. Cowle, her eyes alight, her voice full of eager laughter.

" Would you call me a hopeless imbecile ? " she said.

Frances confused, laughed too and said :

" Hardly, but why ? "

" Oh, perhaps you didn't really mean it . . . about the resident secretary you know. Do you really want one, Mrs. Cowle ? "

" I most certainly do."

In a flash Frances had realised what was coming and her armour was on again, the old chill in her voice, but Julien too eager to notice that, continued :

"Please give me a trial."

"My dear child," Mrs. Cowle's voice was drily protesting, "you are joking, of course. What would your friends think if I suggested taking you away from them?"

"Oh you see I was going away from the Croziers on Monday in any case. At least I wanted to. I have been with them so long, nearly six months, and I'm sure they must be tired of me although they have been so kind."

"You don't mean to say you were going to leave the Croziers and stay in London alone?"

"I was rather undecided. I really expected to go to some other friends but they are not quite ready for me yet. Of course I could stay alone at a boarding-house, but I'm sure Mrs. Crozier would have a fit at the suggestion, and I was—rather looking for some excuse to get away."

Julien made the last confidence impulsively, impelled by something she could not quite explain, an instinctive sense perhaps of the other woman's sympathy, and Frances, horrified, exclaimed:

"But my dear little girl, of course you must come to me then. You shall come as my guest until you are sure your friends *are* ready for you. It's too dreadful to think you should be in such a fix and dependent upon casual hospitality like that, and I'm very glad I discovered it."

She spoke quickly, almost with violence. She did not realise that her own offered hospitality was certainly more casual than any Julien could be expecting; she did not permit herself to think any longer of dangers ahead. She only knew that this girl—her little girl—was here alone among people upon whom she had no claim, who might not be congenial, possibly might not even make her very welcome; and while she was furious at the parental carelessness that had made such a vague arrangement possible, she had a feeling of triumph too. Since they also had neglected their

responsibilities to Julien, had she not all the more right to aid her now ?

But Julien deprecating, and evidently shocked at herself, exclaimed :

" Oh, Mrs. Cowle, I couldn't inflict myself upon you like that. I truly wasn't cadging for an invitation."

" Of course not. But I am cadging for a guest, and I shall be dreadfully hurt if you don't come to me."

They smiled at each other.

" The fact is," said Julien soberly, " if I did come to you as a guest I should be almost certain to offend the Croziers, and I shouldn't like to do that when they've been so good to me. Penelope is a little—touchy and I don't think she quite liked my coming here this afternoon. She said rather pointedly that she had known you much longer than I. But if I could say I was coming to you as your secretary for a few weeks, because you wanted one, they could hardly feel hurt about it, or object, could they ? Still, I won't come unless you really do want one and think I should be useful. I couldn't truly."

" Couldn't you ? But I certainly do want one and I know you could be useful. Haven't I seen it ? So let us placate Miss Crozier by all means. You shall be my secretary at £40 a year from next Monday, until your patience is exhausted, or your friends claim you. Seriously, dear child, you will be doing me a real service, quite apart from the pleasure it will be to have you in the house, but I hope your—people will not mind your coming to me in that capacity. Are you quite sure it will be all right ? "

" It will really." Julien, leaning against the writing-table, lifted a flushed and radiant face. " We used to talk about you so often at home," she said a little shyly, " and wonder if I should ever meet you, because we knew Penelope had, but we never dreamt I'd have the luck to spend a whole afternoon with you, and mother will understand exactly how I feel about this—that it's a kind of glorious adventure."

She added on an inspiration :

"But I could cable to her about it if you'd rather."

"No, no!" exclaimed Frances hastily, "you certainly mustn't do that. It's—it's such a little unimportant matter."

III

Having taken the plunge with regard to Julien, Frances did not look back. In spite of a mind always more or less harassed by petty worries and dismays, she brought to the larger moments of life that high disdain and cool self-confidence before which all barriers fall away. Had not her own life been so built up? And now for Julien she would not do less. The girl should have her glorious adventure, glorious perhaps in a way she least expected, and whatever danger there might be in the connection, she, of all people, should not be threatened. And after all wasn't the danger small enough? Julien's people were far away, and the fact that she had chosen to act as secretary to a woman-writer for a few weeks could have no significance to anyone. Her Australian friends in London were sure to be nearly all of the younger generation, and even if Frances had not built up her own defences far too carefully to have any fear of casual recognition after twenty years, it would be quite easy to be on the safe side. The girl must be allowed to have her own leisure and her own friends like any other secretary, and when she had gone home, twelve thousand miles—didn't Frances know it?—could effectually break the connection.

She sat by the fire for a long time that night thinking the situation over. At first she was exalted, but that mood passed, and she was able to plan with a clear and steady mind. Fate perhaps had brought the girl to her door, but Fate had no longer any terror for her. Life and Fate, what were they after all, but a game where the winner was always he who had the courage for deliberate action? Caution, compromise, patience were but sign-posts for the loser. Even at this juncture,

looking back upon her own life, she knew the game to have been worth the candle.

IV

Julien meanwhile went back to Tarrant Square, full of relief and delighted anticipation. Aid had come to her from the most unexpected quarter, and she was inclined to think this the most thrilling thing that had happened yet. Mrs. Cowle on one side, Tony on the other, what new doors of life might they not open for her? Already the last months of inaction seemed far away.

The Croziers received her news in characteristic fashion.

"Now that is interesting," remarked Mrs. Crozier, "I had no notion you were so clever, my dear. And I suppose you will write Mrs. Cowle's letters for her, won't you? So queer, but these wealthy women I've heard like to have their letters written for them. Now I prefer to write my own."

"I think it's very odd of you to go to Mrs. Cowle in a menial position like that," pronounced Penelope. "What will people think? Why, you might be a common typist."

"I'm rather hoping I'll be an uncommon one," chuckled Julien.

"They'll wonder whatever sort of person we've had staying with us."

"Oh, I don't propose to put an advertisement in the 'Daily Mail' that I'm acting as secretary to Mrs. Cowle, so perhaps the scandal won't get about after all."

"I should hope not indeed."

"And you needn't recognise me if you see me anywhere in this—menial capacity you know, Pen. I shan't be in the least hurt."

"I daresay you'd like it," said Penelope, injured.

Penelope indeed was not only disapproving but uneasy. She was none too sure that Julien, with her

insatiable friendliness, could be trusted to remain in the menial capacity with regard to Mrs. Cowle, and the thought of any real intimacy there filled her with a sick feeling of dismay. Already in six months Julien was far more friendly than she had ever been, not only with Mrs. Cowle, but with George McMorris and even Tony. Penelope, who thought her friendship should have been sufficient for Julien, resented this, since it was only through her good offices that the other girl had met either one of them at all. She was also unpleasantly conscious of having blundered in the matter of Tony, for after all her father would be returning to London in a day or two, and then that association would have ceased as a matter of course. Her affection for Julien was one of the few genuine emotions of her life, and now she was acutely aware that she had set a barrier to it that had never been there before. Julien's smile had lost its old friendliness; she was quite pleasant but unresponsive. There was the barrier like a solid wall between them, and Penelope was suddenly fearful that she would beat her head against it in vain.

"I don't suppose I shall ever see you now," she said in a hard tone of complaint that covered a last pitiful effort to put things back on their old footing.

"Not while I'm in this menial position I suppose, if you feel like that about it."

"You know quite well I don't feel anything except that I want to see you again."

"Oh Pen, you have seen too much of me already and I'm sure you want a rest. You've given me a splendid time, and I'm ever so grateful."

"Don't be silly. You never used to talk like that. We were far too good friends."

Julien laughed.

"To be commonly polite. Penelope, you are getting profound," she said, "but of course I'll come and see you sometimes. I'm not going a thousand miles away."

"I should jolly well hope not."

Tony's cheerful voice from the door brought the two girls round in a moment, and Julien informed him eagerly:

"Tony, what do you think? I'm going to be Mrs. Cowle's private secretary.

"Bully for you!"

Tony liked women to be useful. Most men do. It is only that they should ask to be paid for their utility that the average Englishman finds so shocking to his sensibilities, especially when the women chance to be his own as he would modestly express it. Naturally women should work—for love (of him)—but not for monetary gain, a clear reflection upon his care of them.

Tony Crozier had perhaps lost this particular pose, and his mind was just of that spectacular order to appreciate what Julien's news might mean, to her first of all and indirectly to himself. He said to her when at last they had a moment together, free from Penelope's so melancholy glance:

"By Jove, Julien, what a piece of luck when you come to think of it. I shall be able to show you heaps of things now. We must make arrangements to meet. If you had been staying on here it would have been hopeless because I can't come home when the Pater is about, and Penelope is such a stick. But Mrs. Cowle has brains."

Tony, elated as he was over his latest disciple, was already looking for wider conquests. Why not even Mrs. Cowle herself?

Julien, a little flame of colour in her cheeks and her grey eyes alight, answered:

"Oh yes, there's so much I want to know and see and do. I think I want to do things most of all, however small. Tony, you'll have to help me."

"You bet your life," said Tony.

CHAPTER XII

ELIZABETH'S DAUGHTER

"I saw strange ease
Afloat like a spark on the woman's eyes as she leaned
Forth, and a shadow betwixt her lips like peace!"
Herbert Trench.

I

In Lavender Gardens the October winds blew gently for high houses stood on guard about them, and the world was shut away. Frances Cowle loved these gardens for she had watched there through many seasons the incomparable artistry of leafing time, of lavish summer when the trees became a forest to hide intruding civilization, of Autumn veiled, and golden starred, and the bleak splendour of the winter days. And now, as she prepared for Julien's coming, she found herself looking out very often through the dim avenues of trees, their yellowing leaves a-shower, their trunks black in the mists that hung behind. At these moments deep emotion held her, that was partly delight in the waiting weather, but more and more the stirring of an old force that she had long ago put aside. She had said once to Mrs. Standish that in her life there was room for only one enthusiasm. She had preached that doctrine to herself whenever the possibility of human affection—of any answering tenderness in herself—threatened her peace of mind. Earlier there had been no need to preach it. For her first five years in London she had looked on the world with a mind of pure violence and a spirit frozen out of all relation to the gentler aspects of life. She had been perfectly certain that there was no human thing that could ever remotely touch her life again, and it was out of the absolute detachment of that time that her literary success was

born. That was her refuge. She had known since very fully the exquisite pains of the creator, and the many children of her imagination, unhampered by harsh circumstance, had had all the care she could not give the real child that she had borne twenty-two years ago. And here was that child herself blithely knocking at the doors of her heart. She had kept them closed against all comers, but now slowly and secretly she pushed them open and found a wonderful happiness inside.

The arrangement of Julien's room had been the easiest expression of this mood. She had chosen one beside her own, with windows and a little balcony above the gardens, a place of delicate flowery curtains carpeted in dull pink, with a small white book-case beside the carved wooden bed, a writing-table in the corner, and beyond a tiny dressing-room with wide presses for the girl's frocks. She looked round for some little personal things and tried to put the years back and remember what she at Julien's age would have most cared to have about her, but that brought only the remembrance of how vastly older she had really been, how little she had cared at that period for anything in the world. She went out by and by and bought a set of enamel toilet boxes for the dressing-table, and that gave her extraordinary pleasure. To give the girl such little exquisite things by and by when the acquaintance had progressed a little, was one of the pleasures she need not deny herself.

She filled the book-case from her own shelves, adding a few new novels bought on the way home, and this also was infinitely amusing. She was rather vague as to the scope of a modern girl's reading, except that it would most certainly have shocked her Victorian grandmother to the verge of the grave, and this realisation gave her all at once so vicious a sense of pleasure that she was tempted to make the collection as startling as her own library would permit. But that mood melted very quickly at the thought of Julien, and smiling a little in secret amusement, she put the poems of Alice Meynell beside the latest effort of a terribly

popular novelist, Synge's "Arran Isles," Omar, "Diana of the Crossways," and the latest Kipling book, a penny dreadful, price six shillings, a Shaw play, a fluffy American novel, two Feminist books and Pepys.

How little she knew after all of the girl's mind or the nature that lay behind that outward, smiling picture of her. And yet even that did not seem so dreadfully important any more. The child Julien's unmistakable likeness to her father had been to the Elizabeth of long ago a source of most bitter wonder and alarm. To her hardly normal mind it had seemed the irony of fate indeed that out of her months of revolt this little alien spirit had been born to mirror in her first baby smiles and gestures, the certain source of that revolt. *They* had said that the baby was a "real Archer," had insisted upon it as though it were some sacred right, while the baby's mother, merely the accessory after the fact, perforce looked on, her soul aflame. A mere girl, she was clumsy in her inexperience, shy in the exquisite tenderness of young motherhood. Practised hands took the baby from her uncertain hold and the little Archer was taught, even so early to look to elder Archers. Elizabeth, with empty aching arms, was badgered because she did not care for her own child.

The recollection of these things brought to Frances Cowle a black mood, such as she had not known for many years, and she resolutely thrust it aside. After all her hour had come. Julien was here. In another moment perhaps she would be at her doors. All the powers of the earth, all the Archers in existence should not keep her this time from her mother's arms.

A bell rang and Frances, trembling, hurried to a window and caught a glimpse of the taxi laden with luggage below. She ran downstairs, just as the door opened and the girl came in, her eyes alight and eager above her soft white furs.

"I've come," she said gaily.

"I'm glad," said Frances with her awkward smile, and the two shook hands.

The arms of Elizabeth were still clumsy and inexperienced—and empty.

II

" Dear child, are you sure you have everything you want ? "

Frances had knocked at the dividing door between their bedrooms, and opened it to find Julien, in a pink embroidered kimono, vigorously brushing her hair.

" Couldn't my maid have done that for you ? I sent her to you to see," she said.

" Yes, she offered but I told her not to mind, and I have everything on earth I want," declared Julien gratefully. " Just fancy a private secretary with a maid. Wouldn't it be too funny ? I've never had such a thing in my life though Ida Standish did try to lend me hers. She was a very haughty personage, a reduced Duchess at least I'm sure, though Ida called her Hanson in the most familiar way. The butler admired Hanson because she was such a ' perfect lady,' but Hanson confided to Ida that she preferred a ' younger gentleman.' "

Frances laughed. The girl's frank scorn of assistance pleased her, not wholly because she was ready to be pleased at almost anything to-night, but because it showed that Julien was perfectly natural and devoid of poses.

" I forgot you were such a travelled and independent young person," she said, " and I was just going to mention that my room is here next to yours in case you should be nervous or want anything in the night."

" I shan't be nervous and I'm sure I shall not want anything, but I'm awfully glad I'm next door to you," said Julien impulsively. " Oh, Mrs. Cowle, if you spoil all your secretaries like this, I wonder you ever get rid of them at all."

" Ah ! your secretarial worries have not begun yet. You don't know what is before you."

" I don't feel dreadfully alarmed," smiled Julien and added more soberly : " But please don't be too good to me and do send me flying if I get on your nerves. You know I feel rather guilty, as if I had forced myself upon you."

" My dear little girl." There was a curious note in Mrs. Cowle's voice. " Don't be afraid. I've considered nobody but myself for more than twenty years."

" Of course I don't believe that," said Julien promptly, and they laughed.

The girl had moved away from the dressing-table which was laden with her small belongings, and now Frances saw with a little pang beside the toilet boxes she had brought that morning, another set. Absurdly she had forgotten there were other people who might care for Julien. There was a silver photo-frame on the table too, and in it the picture of a woman who seemed to look at her with kindly, humorous eyes.

" I'm glad you've put out your photographs and things," she said hastily, " because it will make you feel more at home."

" That is my mother," said Julien. " Please come and be introduced to her and see if she isn't a darling."

Frances took the photograph in her cold hands and looked at it with eyes that did not see. After a while she glanced at Julien and said :

" I don't think you are like her, are you ? "

" Oh no, not in the least. In the face I am supposed to be like my father." She added as an afterthought, " She is really my stepmother, though I always forget that. My own mother died when I was a baby."

She tucked a hand in Mrs. Cowle's arm and stood there beside her, looking down with soft eyes at the photograph.

" She's awfully young," she said. " Australian mothers mostly are, you know, nice and young and jolly."

" And you haven't a photograph of—your own mother ? "

" No, I wish I had. Mother and I looked for one

before I came away but we could only find a very old faded thing that couldn't have been in the least like her. We are both tremendously interested in her. Poor girl, she died in France when she had only been married about two years."

She might have been talking of some casual stranger and Frances said faintly :

" And you are like your father ? "

" To look at I believe I am, but not—inside. Mother always says I am like my own mother."

" I suppose she remembers her ? "

" No, she never saw her. We both know very little about her really. I haven't quite liked to ask father things because he is devoted to my stepmother and I was always afraid it might hurt his feelings. And mother declares he never mentions my mother to her in case she might be seized with spasms of green-eyed jealousy."

Mrs. Cowle laughed in swift appreciation. It was so exactly what the man she remembered would have thought. She looked at the photograph with new attention, then put it back on the dressing-table.

" She is certainly a delightful mother," she said.

Julien smiled, exclaiming :

" I should love you to meet her. You simply must come to Australia some day, Mrs. Cowle."

" Australia ! Oh *dear* no."

Frances felt the colour mounting to her cheeks, and released her arm, but she held the girl's hand for a moment and smiled in an uneasy attempt to cover up her own vehemence.

" Even the fact that you were there—and twenty delightful mothers—couldn't tempt me so far," she said. " Good night, dear child."

She pressed the girl's hand convulsively and hurried away. In her own room she lay for hours staring into the darkness.

So after all the child was not a real Archer ? Nothing they could do had been able to make her that. For some time this knowledge brought to Frances a passionate

triumph, triumph over an old dead woman, so frustrated. But by and by she began to realise something else, how she herself had believed it—Oh, she had to grant them that—how all these years she had sub-consciously counted upon it as the first motive—she would not call it justification—of her going away. She had gone away, not from her own child, but from the little Archer, who must in the nature of things grow up to range herself on the other side, and in whose life her mother's presence, with all the friction it must mean, could only be a harsh and painful thing. And after all, she, with the rest of them, had been mistaken. There was torture in the knowledge because she saw how bitterly the girl might, in the circumstances, have suffered all these years. And then to answer that came Julien's smiling, confident young face before her, and another face, smiling too, humorous and wholly kind. She had a sudden picture of these two on the other side of the world, "so tremendously interested" in the poor girl who had died in France twenty-one years ago. It made her smile with a new sense of warmth about her heart, brought with it a very real and at that moment certainly unstinting gratitude to the other woman whom Julien called her mother.

III

The next day the girl told her about Tony. They were in the study where Frances was supposed to be showing Julien the ropes. She had even dictated a wholly unnecessary letter because she wanted to keep up the illusion of work, and Julien having finished that, suddenly looked up and said:

"Mrs. Cowle, are you a suffragist or a feminist or any of those things?"

"Any of those things?" echoed Frances amused.

"Perhaps they are all the same. I don't know much about it but Tony has been telling me and I'm frightfully interested."

"Tony? That isn't Mr. McMorris."

"No, Tony Crozier, Penelope's brother."

"And a suffragist? You surprise me."

Julien chuckled.

"He is rather a thorn in her side."

"So I should suppose. And what else is he? Tell me about him."

"Oh he's a dear. He is really, tall and jolly and very keen about things. He is a Socialist."

"Do you mean by profession?" enquired Mrs. Cowle drily.

"I'm not very clear. Couldn't he be?"

"I'm afraid it has sometimes been done."

Julien laughed and thought it over.

"Then Tony can't be, because he is splendid," she said, and proceeded to enlarge upon his splendours while Frances listened smiling.

"You must ask this paragon to come and see you," she said at last.

"May I really. I rather want to see him because he is going to tell me how I can help his slum girls, and I should just love you to hear the things he can tell you about the sweated women workers. They are perfectly appalling."

Frances did not say that she had heard this subject mentioned once or twice by fairly able speakers. The girl's enthusiasms, however crude, were sacred to her because behind them always her own girlhood seemed to stand and beckon. She was curious about Tony Crozier too, and even a little anxious. She could not help remembering how her own young eagerness had been captivated long ago. Here was a new responsibility, but she had a new tenderness to meet it. She felt strong to turn aside all evil chances and guide the reins of destiny.

IV

A few nights later Tony came to dinner, immaculate, smiling, debonair as usual. Frances, expecting none

of these qualities, regarded him with interest. It surprised her to notice that his Socialism clearly did not interfere with his morning bath or put any serious limit to his laundry bills, also that he bore it cheerfully. As a matter of fact this was one of Tony's chief assets. One expected from his labels an earnest and probably shabby young man obsessed by the wrongs of mankind, full of scorn for an idle world. One found instead a perfectly normal young Englishman, with good clothes, pleasant manners and no apparent anxiety to hold forth.

It was not until Julien insisted indeed that Tony could be persuaded to do that. Then very modestly he brought out his little platitudes all clothed in picturesque language and arrayed them before Mrs. Cowle.

It occurred to her that Tony's orations—speeches was quite too simple a term for them—would be like certain popular novels, profusely strewn with "heart throbs." He talked a good deal about "coming to grips with life," and hinted at many things too dark to be told to delicate feminine ears. He was tremendously affectionate about his sweated workers too, though the source of this possessive pronoun was not wholly clear.

"Then I suppose the only remedy is Trades' Unions?" suggested Frances, when he had talked of their wrongs for some time.

"Oh dear no!" Tony laughed his attractive, good-tempered laugh. He was not in the least aggressive, not even instructive, but he was quite sure of himself and he went on cheerfully:

"That's overdone, you know. It is really. Trades Unions! Phew! it's mighty little my poor dear girls have ever got out of them. No, that's not our ticket. Educate 'em. There's nothing else to be done, whichever way you look at it. Educate 'em and they're free of the cursed system that holds 'em down like a ton of bricks. That's where we're doing our little bit. Oh, it isn't much; it doesn't pretend to be more than a

drop in the ocean, but it's moving things at least. We've got our club-house there at Notting Hill and we have our night classes for the girls, dress-making, millinery and the rest of it. You haven't seen our club, Julien, and by Jove, there's where you can lend a hand, if you really meant it."

"I should rather think I did mean it, but what can I do?" exclaimed Julien, all eagerness.

"Why not a shorthand and type-writing class? I can tell you that would be a fine thing for us and would fill a big want."

"I'd love to do it."

"My dear little girl," Frances smiled a remonstrance, "think of all the dreadfully inefficient typists in the world already. Don't I know it to my cost? Please hesitate before you add to the confusion."

"But they wouldn't be inefficient. I'd see to that."

"Do you realise that you would have absolutely no ground-work to go upon? From what Mr. Crozier tells us these girls haven't anything but the most meagre education."

"Board School," nodded Tony, "but there you are! Heaps of Board School girls graft a little shorthand and typing to their education and get into offices. Why shouldn't my girls have the same chance? That's all we want for them—a chance."

"Of course," said Frances to Julien, "you must do as you like, but how are you going to get home from Mr. Crozier's wonderful club-house. You can't possibly wander about strange districts alone at night!"

"Jove no, but I'll see to that," Tony promised. "I'll come for Julien and bring her back. That goes without saying. We're not far from the Underground, and you may be sure we'll take the greatest care of her. I'd like to show you the club too, Mrs. Cowle, if you would let me. Perhaps you'd come along one night with Julien."

"And perhaps I might start a class for budding novelists," suggested Frances faintly smiling. "It's no good, Mr. Tony. I'm afraid I haven't any ambition

to help my brother man—or sister woman. Like a good many other people I only want to help myself."

Yet in spite of this disclaimer how well she understood the thing that was urging at least one of these young people to action now. She had not fathomed Tony's motives yet, but in Julien's she saw inevitably her own young eagerness of long ago. She knew there was none of the missionary spirit here, no complacency, not even very much cold reason. Tony's appeal for a chance for his sweated workers would have been a clear call to any generous-hearted girl, but even that was incidental. Julien's attitude was more than anything a kind of divine impatience against standing still, a desire to do something however small to move the ball of life along.

Frances remembering how her own impulses had been checked and broken, saw the folly of putting obstacles in the girl's way, now. She told herself that she was not at all sure of Tony; she even felt a little amused at her own so quickly adopted parental attitude of suspicion towards him, but she noticed that the two were altogether too frankly friendly for sentimental danger at the moment, and at least Julien would have in this association with him, *her* chance, the chance to know, not only his outer splendours but his inward deficiencies.

It was a chance Elizabeth had never had. In these first moments of her care for Julien she saw herself powerful to give the girl all those things that she had lacked—and missed.

CHAPTER XIII

DEFENCES DOWN

" How shall I thrust thee apart
Since all my growth tends to thee night and day—
To thee faith, hope and art ?
Swift are the currents setting all one way :
They draw my life, my life out of my heart."

Alice Meynell,

I

FRANCES COWLE held back her happiness with an iron hand. It was a secret and distrusted thing, so frail that its very acknowledgment would be almost certain to blow it away. She welcomed eagerly every pain, every little annoyance or irritation the girl's invasion of her life could bring (and it was bound to bring a good many after her years of life alone), for were not these things the price she paid to keep it a little longer ? Only at night it was there with her in the darkness. She held it fast in her arms.

Julien took possession royally. She was tremendously glad to be there and she made herself at home at once, until it seemed to Frances that the usually quiet house was full of her warm young presence, her laughter and the tones of her voice. Any thought of work at the moment was out of the question to Frances, although at first to keep up the pretence she racked her brains for little things to give the girl to do.

" You know I'm having a disgracefully easy time," Julien said one morning.

Frances smiled at her.

" Just wait till I'm busy," she advised, " besides, I think I wanted a companion even more than a secretary. Do you mind ? "

" Mind ? I simply love it, but I should like to think I was of some use. You will let me be, won't you ?

There are heaps of little things I could do, things I used to do at home."

"Oh my dear child, do them by all means. That—that is just what I should like."

Julien promptly did them. She took over the care of the plants in the little conservatory and the Sheraton cabinet of old china, hitherto served by a nervous maid under the eagle eye of Mrs. Cowle herself. She found Harris, the parlour-maid, sourly arranging the flowers one morning, and promptly added that duty to the rest, while Harris, relieved but superior, looked on.

Harris was a chill young woman with cold, rather prominent blue eyes, that looked as though they might fall out at any minute and roll away. Being a thoroughly well-trained British servant she had strong views on the conduct of society in general, and real ladies and gentlemen in particular, and she was none too sure she approved of Miss Julien Archer.

"What I say is if you're a visitor then behave accordingly, Mrs. Fortescue," said Harris to her friend the cook, "but don't come meddling with servants' work, which is not for young ladies to do. Not but what I was glad enough to get rid of the flowers. It's a pesky thing I never was good at, and the mistress so particular; but it's not only the flowers as you know. And yet we're to treat her like the queen of England on her throne. It's 'Has Miss Archer this?' and 'Are you sure Miss Archer doesn't want the other?' Rum, I call it, very rum!"

"She's quite a pleasant-spoken young person, I hear," contributed Mrs. Fortescue cautiously.

"Pleasant? A deal too pleasant. She's affable, Mrs. Fortescue, and it's a thing I've not been used to from my ladies. I like people to keep their place. 'Nonsense, Harris,' she says to me about the flowers, 'you know you're simply dying for me to do them.' Then she laughs. Very familiar I call it. It gave me quite a turn."

"Lor!" said Mrs. Fortescue.

But Harris had her vulnerable spot and Julien all unwittingly found it one afternoon.

She was standing at the top of the iron steps that led from the library window into the Gardens when a small brown dog rushed out of the area door below, followed by the protesting Harris.

"Spiders! Spiders! Come here this moment, sir. Come along then to his mother, darling," called Harris in a kind of stage whisper, and not venturing further than the door.

Spiders ignored his mother. He was an absurd little dog of doubtful extraction, with a great many silky curls about his eyes, but a conspicuous lack of this decoration anywhere else, and a pair of large untidy ears that flapped about as though he had long ago lost control of them. He began operations by chasing a leaf defiantly round the grass plot, but in the middle of that became annoyed by the eccentricities of his own tail, and went to see about it until he was nothing but a mass of whirling legs and hair. Harris still called urgently from the door but although he unwound himself at last it was only to dash to the little iron gate opening into the gardens. Here he stood, tail working feverishly and all his little queer body a-quiver, as he gazed into this enchanted country where a dog might really hope to see life at last.

"Spiders," said Julien running down the steps, "what a wicked rascal not to go in when you're called."

Spiders wagged his tail harder than ever, folded up his right ear, and with a growl of joy, rushed to devour the nearest slim foot of this strange new apparition into his youthful world.

"*Spiders,*" protested Harris rushing to the rescue, but Julien caught the little creature in her arms, where he proceeded to lick her face with enthusiasm.

"Isn't he a darling?" she exclaimed. "Does he belong to the house? I didn't know we had a dog."

Harris cast an uneasy look behind her, and a sly one at Miss Archer.

"No, Miss," she said carefully non-committal.

"Oh! he's just a visitor? The dear fellow. I simply must show him to Mrs. Cowle, and he shall have a red hair-ribbon to keep the hair out of his eyes. Has she seen him, Harris?"

"Oh no, Miss." Harris's agitation was unmistakable, "Why, it would be as much as my place is worth. You'll—you'll not mention it? The mistress would be *that* angry."

"Angry—with Spiders? Oh what nonsense! Why, he'd melt a heart of stone, wouldn't you, you fat villain? He is a beautifully silky little dog, and quite a baby, isn't he?"

"Oh yes, Miss, and no wonder he's silky for he has his bath regular every week like a Christian and not a cry out of him. He's a proper trained dog whatever you may say about his breeding. Slept quiet in the scullery he has, every night since we brought him in near to starving."

Harris's pride in these achievements was so great that she had completely given herself away, and Julien exclaimed enlightened:

"Oh! you rescued him, and that's why you think Mrs. Cowle will be angry? I'm perfectly sure she won't be anything of the kind. Just let me take him in to her and see."

She ran upstairs again with Spiders in her arms, adding to the protesting and almost tearful maid: "It's quite all right. You shan't get into trouble, Harris."

Then she invaded the drawing-room, and put the excited armful of little brown dog on the hearth-rug at her friend's feet.

"I've brought you a visitor."

The visitor proceeded to investigate Mrs. Cowle's silk skirts. Then apparently satisfied he folded up his ears, sat down and wagged his tail while the two looked on and laughed.

"You weird little object! Where on earth have you come from?" enquired Frances.

Julien sat on the hearth-rug.

"He says he was a poor, stray, starving foundling dog," she explained.

"Oh indeed? Then his looks belie him. If you brought him in out of a cold world on that account, my child, I'm afraid you'll have an infuriated owner looking for you."

"Oh, I didn't rescue him," said Julien, "and since he was a gutter dog he has been washed and fed up every morning before breakfast, haven't you, Spiders, old man?"

"You seem to be well up in his history, past and present. Whose dog is he?"

"Harris's."

Julien had moved nearer and she slipped a coaxing hand into the other's arm. Frances, always curiously afraid of these caresses, held the hand nervously as she smiled and said:

"You're incorrigible! If you can extract confidences from the chilly Harris, you'll do anything. Tell me about it."

Julien did. "I knew you wouldn't mind," she finished triumphantly, but Harris was quite determined you would be dreadfully annoyed about it. I left her almost in tears."

"Ah you see she knows me better than you do—Julien."

She had never used her Christian name before. She did so now a little awkwardly, but the girl looked up with swift pleasure.

"I like you to call me that," she said, "and as for knowing you better than I do, it's a base libel. I believe I've known you for ever."

Frances rose abruptly to her feet, her face of a sudden expressionless and hard.

"I must ring for Harris," she said.

So Harris came, injured and on the defensive, but after all it seemed the fates were to be kind. Spiders was living a life of ease on the hearth-rug, while Miss Archer tied the promised scarlet ribbon to his ridiculous tail. By this token he became officially a member of the household, and its mistress even suggested to Harris that he should come upstairs, and

certainly go out for a run every day." Further she promised to pay for his registration forthwith.

Harris with this glorified Spiders clasped to her heart, went back to her friend Mrs. Fortescue almost incredulous.

"It's a miracle, that what it is," she said with decision. "There was the mistress that soft you'd think she couldn't say a sharp word to save her life, and the young lady down on the floor as pretty as a picture, playing with Spiders. Undignified if you like, Mrs. Fortescue, but then a real lady can do these things."

This was realised to be Harris's final word. Thereafter Julien, and the situation generally, might be as rum as they pleased, but Miss Harris, whose chilly glance ruled the basement at 19 Lavender Gardens, was ready to freeze any rash soul who dared to suggest it.

II

In fact the girl fitted into the hitherto solitary household with an almost alarming ease, it seemed to Frances, who underneath this outward dismay was glad and proud of it. It had been decided that Julien should have her own hours of leisure and the den had been turned into a cosy little sitting-room where she might entertain her friends, but of course, this excellent arrangement was not really carried into effect. However Frances might plan to keep the girl to some extent at arm's length she was defeated by Julien's absolute blindness to any such intention. Julien indeed had just that confidence in herself and a kindly fate that the elder woman lacked, and she grasped the good things that came to her with eager hands. The two were consequently much together during those first weeks, Frances notwithstanding, and almost every day she began to realise with a kind of fearful triumph that they found some new common interest. In spite of her long residence in London Frances knew the grey old city and loved it as only its intimates can do. It

was a silent devotion, however. Even the smallest expression of it would have found her self-conscious, and while she began little by little to show the girl some of the things she cared about, it was outwardly without enthusiasm. They explored the old, old churches that lie hidden away with their message of ancient pieties in the little muddy, poverty-haunted streets of to-day. They drove Northward past Dick Whittington's stone, and from Highgate Hill looked down through the mists upon a London so enchanted. They walked in the queer old cloisters of the Temple, and stood above the sleepy gardens where hundreds of years before had blossomed red roses and white roses that became the emblems of a civil war. And here, looking round the quiet old court, Julien said suddenly:

"Somewhere here Mr. McMorris has his rooms. I'm glad, aren't you? because he likes it so. He loves old London just as you do."

Frances had not said she loved it and she thought this was a kind of divine intuition. She smiled at the girl, and then because her eyes were dim, resolutely shook her mind back to the subject of McMorris.

"By the way, what has become of Mr. McMorris? Isn't he rather a friend of yours?" she asked.

"Oh yes, we get on splendidly," declared Julien. "He's so nice and frivolous, isn't he? And you know he can be very interesting when he likes, though he doesn't like often."

"Um—yes. I have read several of his critical essays that I thought rather fine."

"Does he write essays? Does he really?" exclaimed Julien in amazement, "He never told me that. But of course he wouldn't, I suppose. Why I thought he was one of—one of the idle rich."

She laughed almost in dismay, and Frances instantly guessed that in that thought there had been a subtle though possibly unconscious comparison with Tony Crozier, always to the latter's glory. In her mind's eye she saw the two young men side by side and began to wonder whether Julien had ever done that. Deciding

this was an inspiration, she said carelessly to the girl:

"I must give you some of his things to read." Then she apparently forgot the subject of McMorris and they went home.

But the next afternoon she went, in further pursuit of her inspiration, to Buckingham Gate, for once leaving Julien to her own devices. Mrs. Standish and Ida had gone out but Arthur Standish was in the house nursing a cold, so Frances went in to the pleasant prospect of a chat with her old friend.

"By Jove, Frances, this is good of you," he exclaimed, "I have been thinking of you all the morning, and here you are. If that isn't telepathy I'd like to know what you call it."

"Pure accident," declared Frances. "I decided to come here last night."

"Ah well, we won't cavil about terms. You're here, that's the chief thing."

"As a matter of fact I came because I wanted some advice."

"Good! I'm an excellent Father Confessor."

"From Ida," finished Frances drily. Then she smiled at him relenting, "Do you know what's happened to me, Arthur? I actually have a visitor," she said, and proceeded to tell him about Julien's presence at Lavender Gardens, adding: "I really want Ida to help me amuse the child. I suppose it's significant, but I am the most friendless person. I know hardly any young people I can ask to the house, and I can't expect a slip of a girl to be satisfied with nothing but my aged society."

"I hope she hasn't expressed any dissatisfaction," observed Mr. Standish in a shocked tone, "and may I ask whether you always consider the entertainment of your secretaries?"

For a second Mrs. Cowle caught her breath. Then she laughed.

"I thought we were not going to cavil about terms," she said.

"Ah, that's one to you, isn't it? Do go on. You

know, secretary or not, I'm glad the little Archer girl is with you. It's an excellent arrangement."

"Have you really found one of my actions you can approve at last? How nice."

They smiled at each other.

"Oh! it isn't your actions I disapprove of," Standish assured her blandly, "it's one of your inactions."

"You don't know your own good fortune."

"The Lord forbid! I can't imagine a more horrible fate. But to return to your young friend, Miss Archer, what is it you want Ida to do, go out into the highways and hedges, collect some young and frivolous society and send it to you on approval?"

"I want all of you to come to me on Sunday afternoon to begin with, and I want Ida to bring George McMorris if she can persuade him to come. It is useless for me to ask him because he doesn't like me, but possibly if Ida told him Julien would be there—"

"Match-making? Really, Frances, you're a revelation this afternoon. I feel better already."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Cowle with unnecessary heat, "he is a friend of Julien's, and he also happens to be one of the few young men I know even remotely. Besides Julien will be going home in a few months."

"Too bad! By the way I was waiting for McMorris when you managed to cut me so completely yesterday."

"I did? This is the first I've heard of it."

"Of course it is, but that's my nice Christian nature. I take these blows of fate like the proverbial lamb. As a matter of fact I was in McMorris's chambers and I saw you and your protégée strolling into Fountain Court. I very nearly whistled but you looked so much engrossed I hadn't the heart to disturb you. There is no doubt you ought to have had a daughter, Frances."

"*What do you mean?*" exclaimed Frances violently. Her cheeks were scarlet and her eyes flashed. Standish, naturally misunderstanding, was contrite at once. He leant forward and tried a little awkwardly to take her hand.

"I'm a cursed fool," he said, "I'd rather have died than hurt you like that."

"Oh," said Frances faintly, "please don't!"

She was overwhelmed by a feeling of irritation, dismay, even a secret shame, for how could she tell him that he had not hurt her, that her outburst was not the result of any such noble emotion as he supposed? unless indeed, she told him everything. For one wild moment she almost thought of doing that, but the rush of relief the suggestion brought her stopped her in time. She had learned to distrust the things she wanted to do.

"I'm horribly irritable," she said with a little troubled smile, "I'm sure you must wish I'd left you in peace."

"My dear, you know that's the last thing on earth I ever want you to do."

She laughed, then suddenly gentle, gave him her hand.

"I know, but I wonder if you know just how much your friendship has meant to me all these years. I don't think I've ever told you, but then, it's not one of the things that can be told."

"Friendship?" scoffed Mr. Standish. "It's a chilly word."

"It hasn't been a chilly fact."

"No," he said, "it hasn't been a chilly fact for me either. That's the worst of having influenza at forty-two," he added whimsically after a moment, "you get let in for these weak admissions. And I say, in spite of my aged and enfeebled condition, can't I be of any use with regard to your little friend? I'm almost sure I could develop a perfect mania for theatre-parties and other frenzied excitements of that kind—do the old bachelor uncle act in short."

"Is it Frances you are offering to be an uncle to?" enquired Ida's voice at this moment from the door.

The two at the fire exchanged a swift glance full of laughter, and several other things.

"Oh I wish he would," said Frances fervently.

III

It was raining heavily as she drove home, and she looked into the shining streets to see the world go by blurred and secret under its multitude of wet umbrellas. She remembered with dismay that it was to-night Julien had promised to go to his club with Tony Crozier, but there was relief in the knowledge too. She was suffering a reaction from the sudden emotion of the afternoon and the old solitude called to her irresistibly at the moment.

Julien was in the study holding a serious conversation with Spiders who sat on the hearthrug and listened politely while he watched her out of a pair of wise brown eyes. As Frances opened the door and looked in at them the girl jumped to her feet with a little exclamation of welcome.

"Did you have a nice time?" she said, "and did they tell you I've had a visitor? At least she was your visitor, of course, but I borrowed her."

"I'm glad, dear," smiled Frances, "but a visitor for me? Who could it have been?"

"Well, she wasn't exactly a visitor I suppose. It was your last secretary, Miss Holland, and she was in rather a state of mind, poor girl."

"Miss Holland coming here? and you say you entertained her? May I ask what she came for?" enquired Mrs. Cowle, with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm.

"How it happened," Julien explained, "was that I had taken Spiders for a walk, but it came on to rain so we scuttled home as quickly as possible. And we found this girl at the door. They were telling her you were not at home, and she was looking most awfully disappointed and bewildered. It was pouring too, and she hadn't a coat or umbrella, so I said could I do anything and hadn't she better come in until the rain stopped. She seemed very nervous about it but she came, and I brought her up here to the fire and asked her if I could

give you any message. I told her I was your secretary. I suppose that gave her confidence for she explained that she had been your secretary too, and now she can't get anything to do. She came to ask if you would give her a recommendation."

"Oh she did, did she?" Mrs. Cowle's voice was distinctly cold. "Then she might have spared herself the trouble. I don't rcommend people who are incompetent and untrustworthy, I consider it dishonest, and Miss Holland was both, as I've already told several people who have applied to me about her. She never did her work properly and she left me without any warning or explanation, simply didn't come. And then she had the impertinence to give people my name as a reference. The brazen impudence of these young women is amazing."

"She didn't seem brazen, she didn't really," Julien eagerly assured her. "As a matter of fact she seemed horribly frightened, and I'm sure she thought you'd almost eat her, but she was pretty desperate, you see. She told me she wasn't nearly good enough for you because she has never really been trained at all. It seems her father died suddenly and left them without anything, and she and her sister had to support their mother, when they had never expected to have to work at all. She went as a companion and taught herself shorthand and type-writing in her spare time, so that she could go home and be with her mother. She said she knew she oughtn't to have left you like that but she felt you weren't satisfied with her, and she thought it would be easy to get another position as she had had a little experience. It wasn't of course. She hasn't been able to get a thing to do since, and her sister who is a teacher in a big girls' school at Weston-super-Mare, only gets £26 a year. It seems awful, doesn't it? I said I was sure you'd do anything you could for her."

"Really! this is too much." Frances had listened to Julien's breathless story with rising indignation. She considered that she already had quite enough cause for complaint against her late secretary. She was tired

too, and thoroughly on edge, and Julien's cool ordering of the affair struck the final note of irritation.

" You had no possible right to tell her anything of the kind," she said sharply, " and I shall certainly not recommend her. And please understand I don't like interference, Julien. You are much too officious ! "

She walked out of the room closing the door behind her. Julien, looking blank, returned to Spiders on the hearthrug.

" Old man," she said, " I'm afraid our cake is dough."

Spiders bit her shoe in sorrowful confirmation.

IV

Half an hour later Tony called for her.

Frances was still in her room and Julien knocked at the door to say she was going, but received only the brief reply :

" Very well, Julien. Good-bye."

The girl went rather dolefully downstairs and presented herself for Tony's inspection.

" Shall I do ? " she said showing him the dark blue frock beneath her rain-coat.

" You look ripping."

" Oh Tony, I'm not asking for compliments. I've put on the plainest frock I could find. Do you think it's all right ? "

" Is it plain ? " enquired Tony with interest. " Jove, girls are funny things. I should call it a regular stunner myself, and I'm glad because of course I want you to make a great impression. That'll be such a feather in my cap, won't it ? And you needn't be afraid of spoiling your pretty frocks down there, you know. The club's a miracle of cleanness."

" It's not that I'm afraid of. It is just that it seems so mean to go and flaunt elaborate frocks at people who can't afford to have them."

" I say, you are a funny girl, Julien," declared Tony, who did not understand such sensibility.

"Am I?"

Julien sighed. She was beginning to think there must be something in it.

"As for my poor dear girls," continued Tony, "they'll simply love your pretty togs—and probably go home and copy them straight away."

Julien laughed.

"Then so they shall if they like," she said.

They went off together through the rain that whispered to the pavements and tapped like a patient messenger on shrouded window panes. Even this trim old street, so sober and well-conducted, seemed full of mystery to-night, of leaves that ran with a flutter of laughter before the windy rain, of little golden lights that came out from nowhere to dance in the roadway and melt away again, of friendly houses, opening one by one their yellow eyes upon the world. With these delights about her and Tony's friendly presence and the warmth of their common interest, Julien's spirits rose again, and only a little dim worry, away in the back of her mind, remained to tell her of the afternoon.

They turned out of the gardens presently down a narrow passage and into a busier road, where traffic raced and the letters of Somebody's Tea ran up and down the sky like a spider in a hurry. Here was the Underground, ejecting a great many people with an air of harsh dislike, eating up the rest indiscriminately. Julien found herself hurrying through its stony labyrinths, rushing downstairs, racing for the platform to the clatter and bang of phantom trains in pursuit, always the same Alice-in-Wonderland adventure come to life.

They were on the way at last, the train swinging through the close little tunnels, tumbling into stations, and clattering on, then out in the air again, with the eyes of London blinking all about.

But this was a different London. Julien had a confused picture afterwards of dim streets, and dim, tall houses, that, from the clatter of bad pianos out of

tune, clearly hoped to teach music when they grew up. Then there were more streets where even that vague atmosphere of hope was lost, and these seemed full of little greengrocers' shops that had been charged by the wind and rain, and retreated leaving their dead and wounded on the pavements. From the mud and cabbage stalks they reached at last a blazing corner, and here was Tony's club-house with a cheerful, open doorway, a hum of voices and a line of ragged youngsters peering curiously in.

There was a small square entrance full of posters and notices, and beyond a hall where meetings were held from time to time. On either side and overhead a labyrinth of class-rooms opened, some of them already full, as shrill voices and hardly repressed giggles revealed.

A bald little man came hurrying to meet them in a moment. All his hair seemed to have gone to his moustache, which was black and flourishing. He wore a ready-made suit and a pink starched shirt, and his name it appeared was Mr. Hodges.

Mr. Hodges took Tony aside and talked to him in a busy undertone, and Tony said "Quite right, old chap! Good for you, Hodges," at friendly intervals. At last he succeeded in introducing the little man to Julien and he shook hands enthusiastically and said: "Pleased to meet you."

"My friend Miss Archer is going to look after the new clerical class," explained Tony.

"That's right," said Mr. Hodges beaming encouragement.

A great many other people were introduced during the evening and all of them were pleased to meet her, and said she was right. There was Miss Smiley, who was a Board School teacher, and wore invisible glasses and elaborate clothes. Miss Smiley privately thought Mr. Crozier's lady friend a poorly-dressed person and not a bit elegant. She herself held a class for would-be orators, chiefly keen-looking young men, whose accent and grammatical eccentricities she corrected with a

lofty scorn. Then there was a tall woman with her mouth full of pins, who taught dress-making, and held gloomy views about everything in general and husbands in particular. There was Mrs. Hodges too, discovered in the kitchen among her tea urns and brilliant yellow buns, refreshments being obtainable in the club for a penny, and a paying proposition at that, thanks to Mrs. Hodges. The only other person who stood clearly out in the picture was an intelligent looking youth whom everyone called Reg. Reg's coat pockets bulged with cheap classics and he looked after the club library, and ran a debating society, while acting as a kind of amateur Tony.

Tony's official place in all this Julien did not gauge at once, but he was apparently the shining centre about which everyone else revolved. Julien, usually clear enough minded, did not realise at the moment how much Tony's capacity for illumination might depend upon the comparative dullness of his surroundings. Interested as she was in her first glimpse of this little world, she remembered that Tony, unlike the rest of them, had given up everything for it, his home at least, and to a great degree the association with his kind. It must surely have needed a very passionate conviction to make him do that, and it was fine of him. Another point escaped her—that Tony might possibly enjoy the rôle of bright and particular star in whatever firmament.

Her own class soon absorbed her. There were only four girls to-night. One giggled a good deal and was not likely to stay, Julien decided, the other three were keen enough, and the smiling and friendly instructor soon had them interested. The eldest of the girls appealed to her particularly. She was pale and jaded looking, and while the rest were soon chattering freely of their affairs and aspirations, she said nothing at all but sat in silence. It was perhaps this fact and a certain dogged quality about her that awakened in Julien at least a faint realisation of some of the forces against which such a girl might have to contend. It made her think of her visitor of the afternoon, and with that

came a sense of rising indignation, of disappointment and dismay. Oh ! it was too bad that people who had so much, who had everything in the world, could be so unfeeling. Here again the thought of Tony came uppermost, Tony so blithely self-sacrificing and fine, Tony doing his " little bit " while the rest of a heartless world wouldn't do anything at all.

V

Frances Cowle's return to her old solitude had failed to be as soothing as she had expected. She was restless, and the steady swish of the wind and rain outside beat on her nerves like a hammer. She found herself going continually to the window to look out at the long, deserted, shining street, though she knew that Julien could not possibly be back yet. Not that she wanted her. She felt indeed an extraordinary irritation that was not unmixed with embarrassment over the affair of the afternoon. The fugitive, Miss Holland, had already annoyed her a good deal, and Julien's interference seemed the last straw, because she saw in it a subtle criticism of herself. It was not likely after her years of self-absorption that she should be used to that or likely to bear it cheerfully. She had grown too during the past few weeks very sensitive to the girl's evident affection and admiration for her, and now it seemed to her exaggerated fancy that these things would surely be swept away. Of course it was her own fault for ever having allowed the whole preposterous situation or the girl's intrusion into her life at all. She told herself she wanted one thing only, and that was to be out of it all, back in the old unhindered days of quiet work and peace of mind.

Then suddenly the hall door opened to a rush of wind and the noise of the rain. The drawing-room door was also blown ajar, and a cold blast of air came into the firelit room, followed by Julien.

The girl still wore her coat, and little drops of rain

clung to her hair. For once she was not smiling and her grey eyes were a little doubtful, but Frances did not notice that. She only knew that after all it was not solitude or peace of mind, but the girl herself she wanted. she wanted her more than anything in the world.

"Oh my dear child, you must he half drowned," she exclaimed, jumping up. "Come over to the fire and take off your wet things at once."

"I'm not so very wet," said Julien, "but it *is* nice to get home."

Frances thrilled at that, and all her efforts could not hide the tenderness of her smile.

"But perhaps you are going to send me flying?" said Julien meekly, and then they laughed.

"What should I do without you? Indeed I was beginning to be afraid the sweated workers had stolen you altogether."

Frances' voice was queer and her hands shook a little as she helped the girl off with her coat. She was beset by a wild longing to take her in her arms and hold her there, but always the old awkwardness and fear of herself prevented. She bent down and poked the fire into a blaze.

"I warned you that I was an irritable and bad-tempered person, didn't I?" she said, "and now you know how true it is."

"Indeed I don't. You were quite right to be annoyed by my interfering ways."

"It's no good making excuses for me like that, Julien. Why, I was perfectly hateful to one of my best friends this afternoon: then I came home and bullied you, poor little girl. As for your protégée, Miss Holland, I am sure she thinks I am a most terrifying person."

"Oh that's absurd of course. I told her it was," exclaimed Julien eagerly. Then a warm young arm crept round the other's waist and the girl's cheek was laid against her shoulder. "Oh dearest, I think that's really why I wanted you to help her," she said, "you've been so heavenly to me and I can't bear anyone even to think you're terrifying."

"Heavenly to you? My dear, you don't know what you're saying."

"Yes I do. You don't know how homesick I was until you took pity on me and then it was all right."

"Was it really? I'm glad. I'd like you to feel this is your—home, your London home."

"I believe I do already, and I'd rather have it than all the other homes in London put together."

"My dear little girl!"

"But you know," Julien added after a moment, sitting down on the hearthrug, "I'm a dreadful fraud as a secretary, and I do wish you wouldn't give me a salary any more."

"And then what shall I do when I'm busy and want your help? After all a salary is a very useful institution, because it gives one a kind of proprietary right to bully the poor victim. That's a platitude, Julien, the most deadly form of argument I know."

"As if you couldn't bully me anyhow. And of course I'd be your secretary just the same. I'd be an honorary secretary."

"A kind of concentration of all the amateurs on earth? Heaven forbid."

They laughed.

"The fact is," said Julien, "I can't help feeling rather guilty about it because I don't need the money and so many other people do."

"Were you thinking of providing me with one of the sweated workers?" enquired Mrs. Cowle with interest, "for I suppose it is your friend Tony who is responsible for this latest doctrine?"

"Oh no, Tony didn't mention it. He seemed quite pleased I was going to be your secretary when I first told him some weeks ago, and we haven't discussed it since."

Julien looked thoughtfully into the fire for a moment.

"I suppose he should have done so too if he's a Socialist," she added suddenly.

"Ah well, some men don't take their views as seriously as they imagine."

"No they don't, do they?"

There was sudden energy in Julien's words, and after a while she added:

"I think you're—you're awfully understanding. I suppose it's your genius."

"Julien dear, you talk as though it were a hat," declared Frances laughing, but underneath the laughter there was a new fear at her heart. In a flash she had suspected that Julien's vehement words did not really refer to Tony at all but to someone else, why not her father, the father whom in their many conversations she had barely mentioned? And wasn't this almost certainly, seeing the girl she was, a harsh experience to which that desertion of long ago had betrayed her? With the memory of her own bitter awakening rushing back upon her, she was filled with a passionate desire to make it up to the girl, now at once, in any foolish way at her command.

"Suppose you let me exercise my so-called genius a little further," she said looking down at her with an uneasy smile, "you were really thinking of Miss Holland with regard to the salary, weren't you? But she wouldn't benefit if you gave it up a hundred times, because I could not possibly have her back. But I'll tell you what I might do, Julien. Suppose I write and offer her a provisional recommendation on condition that she lets me send her for some really good lessons in between."

"Oh would you? would you really? exclaimed Julien, jumping to her feet.

She stood there before her mother, slim and tall, a warm colour playing in her cheeks.

"You do the most heavenly things of anyone I've ever known," she said, "and I simply must kiss you."

Frances threw her fears away and held her fast in her arms,

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CHAPTER XIV

FRANCES ARRANGES THE STAGE

I

REACTION came, of course, scorn too of her own weakness where she had been so sure of strength, but underneath it all the time, steady and clear, a flame of triumph burned and lit the world for her.

One thing resulted from the talk with Julien. Frances took up her neglected work and resolutely gave a definite time to it every day, not only to satisfy the girl's scruples but to provide an armour against herself.

It was not easy, for hitherto she had worked at all hours and in all places, and she found she was not of those equable people who can write successful novels from 9.30 to 1.45 every morning. Here, however, Julien proved an unexpected assistance. The girl still had her enormous respect for the importance of the celebrity, and it was in that capacity that she chiefly saw her new friend. She kept a wary eye out for signals and at the first glimpse of Mrs. Cowle's notebook and fountain pen, melted away.

Julien's attitude in fact was simply that of an interested public worshipping at the shrine of notoriety, a public a little jealous for its favourite too.

"Why shouldn't you have your photograph taken at your writing-desk," she said looking up resentfully one day from the pages of a magazine. "I'm sure you're much better looking and forty times as celebrated as this creature."

"My dear, what a horrible suggestion."

"Is it? Why, do you mean it would be infra dig.? But I'm sure people love to see that sort of thing. At least I do."

"Perhaps you would like me to supply my photograph in various picturesque attitudes from the age of one month to the present day?"

" I should love it."

" Julien, Julien, you are a hopeless vandal."

" Am I ? " said Julien cheerfully, " then please pander to my foolish tastes and let me see them even if the poor old general public can't. I've never seen a photo of you, and I want one badly."

" I don't possess such a thing, haven't had one taken for many years, and I'm sure you have quite enough of me without that."

" I haven't. Besides I should like to send one to my people."

" *Nonsense !* "

" I shall snap you with my camera some day when you are not noticing."

" You had better not dare," said Frances with such energy that the girl stared.

" You're awfully funny," she said slowly, " you will never believe that people are frightfully interested in you."

Frances recovering herself said lightly :

" Perhaps I think they wouldn't be if they saw my photograph."

" Oh well, I daresay it wouldn't do you justice," decided Julien, and the other woman left it at that with a certain amount of grim amusement, as a fairly safe road out of a dangerous conversation.

On the whole she was relieved by Julien's vandalism for she was a little tired of the pseudo-intellectual young people who in every age rise up and call themselves modern. Frances had met the latest examples of the cult, had heard their glib quotations from decadent foreigners, their scorn of everything any other age had been able to produce. Her interested investigation had discovered in Julien on the other hand a healthy dislike of " drivel," and an extensive knowledge of the classics, sandwiched between inexhaustible familiarity with people she, Frances, had never heard of in her life. It was at least a hopeful vandalism she decided.

She gave the girl several of McMorris' essays to read during the week, but the ruse was spoiled, for when

Sunday brought the Standishes and Tony, and one or two other people, McMorris was not of the party after all. He had a previous engagement, Ida explained.

"Of course he had," said Mrs. Standish, "like every other man when he's wanted. It's a desire to make you think he's as important as he fondly believes himself, precious creature! What the young men of the present day are coming to I don't know, but it's certainly not their senses."

"Ida seems to think it is quite a genuine engagement" said Frances, who had her doubts.

"She would. Ida and Arthur are exactly alike. They believe everything their friends choose to tell them and I never knew such a woeful lack of imagination. If George said he was going to the North Pole, Ida would merely beg him not to get his feet wet, and if you told Arthur you'd had fourteen husbands already he would still spend the rest of his life wishing he'd been one of them. There are a number of fools in my family."

"Would you include our young friend Tony?" Frances enquired with some haste.

Mrs. Standish regarded her nephew over her glasses.

"Nice, clean young man," she said at last, "I can't think how he does it, living in Bedlam too. You know Tony Clozier always reminds me of a novel with a purpose, bad art, isn't that the correct expression? I suppose it's because he will insist upon setting us all such a good example, a thing I never could put up with. You're not letting that nice child, Julien Archer, see too much of him, are you?"

"Yes," said Frances, "that is exactly what I am trying to do."

Mrs. Standish smiled grimly.

"Ah!" she said. "Excellent!"

II

The fact that Tony's shining qualities were not appreciated in the Standish household seemed likely to upset the little plan to present the two young men to

Julien's gaze side by side, for while invitations to Lavender Gardens found McMorris engaged, Tony was not forthcoming at any of the Buckingham Gate festivities.

Frances, although she hardly knew why, was certain that George McMorris would continue to evade her invitations, and the certainty found her regretful and a good deal puzzled too.

She had been much abroad for some years before her meeting with the young man at Buckingham Gate twelve months ago, and it happened therefore, in spite of her intimacy with the Standishes, that she had never seen a great deal of him. Looking back at their few, brief and sometimes not even very civil encounters, she was inclined to wonder why she had such a distinct sense of liking him or at least of being ready to do so if he would give her the chance. She was also convinced that he had no intention of doing that, for his antagonism, or whatever it was, had been perfectly open from the first. He was honest at least.

That indeed was really at the root of the whole matter. Having disliked Mrs. Cowle and shown it, he was not going to make use of her now to gain access to the presence of Miss Archer or anybody else. Neither was he in the least likely to explain such an attitude, and Ida, who had argued with him at great length on the subject of going to Mrs. Cowle's, gave it up and decided he was the most obstinate person she had ever met.

"You have no taste, George," she told him with an air of having made an important discovery.

"Oh come now, what about my hopeless and life-long devotion to you?" remonstrated the young man easily.

"I don't see much evidence of it."

"Ida!" reproachfully, "and you know I'd die for you if corpses weren't such a bother about the place."

"Frances seems to have taken a great fancy to Julien Archer," Ida continued, unheeding this touching declaration.

" Negative virtue ! Who wouldn't ? "

" She even seems to have taken a fancy to you."

" Oh ! that's a vice of course," said Mr. McMorris firmly. (It was at least another reason why he should avoid Mrs. Cowle's hospitality, for of course he was not going to be flattered into changing his stand.)

" Personally I don't think it's at all nice of you to fling me at the lady's head in this manner," he told his cousin severely. " It almost looks as if you didn't love me any more."

Ida looked at him with a kind of serene wonder, her delicate brows raised a little as though she were not quite sure of him, her eyes faintly smiling.

" Oh no," she said comfortingly, " of course it doesn't."

III

The Standishes gave a dinner party a few nights later and McMorris took Julien down. He had watched her come into the drawing-room with Mrs. Cowle and had decided that the latter was looking quite pleasant for once, and that Julien was also a new creature since their last meeting in the somewhat weighty atmosphere of Tarrant Square. That at least he supposed had to be conceded to Mrs. Cowle.

" Let's talk all dinner and make up for lost time," he suggested to Julien as they took their places. " I daresay you haven't noticed it but I haven't seen you for a blue moon—since you went to live in the dragon's castle in fact."

" Last time you called her a cat, I believe," observed Julien, " isn't your natural—or rather unnatural—history a little strange, Mr. McMorris ? "

" All history is strange, stranger than fiction—or is it friction ? Ida, this soup is rotten. I believe you made it."

Ida, who sat on the other side of him, said sympathetically :

" Poor George, don't you like it ? " And her partner, a melancholy-looking young man named Callendar, remarked in a sad tone :

"Fearful bounder, McMorris! I'll kick him out if you like."

"Oh, not in public," Ida begged him.

"Don't know why we came, do you?" enquired George of Julien, "but I suppose we must make the best of a bad dinner—high thinking and low living, as the proverb says. Ida, you may listen to our intellectual conversation if you like because it will be good for you. I love doing good to my relations. I find it's the only way I can really annoy them."

"Um!" said Ida absently, and went on talking to Mr. Callendar.

"See how my kindness is appreciated, Miss Archer, and you don't look in the least sympathetic. That's the result of staying with lions—well isn't she a lion?—a literary lion? I thought I was not only being polite but truthful too, and that's a miracle even you couldn't often perform."

"Please go on, Mr. McMorris, I'm enjoying your performance very much." He laughed.

"You are not home-sick any more?"

"No, nor emancipated nor anything else that is horrid."

"Then the holy terror must be taking good care of you."

Miss Archer turned her back.

"I'm going to talk to my other neighbour, who is at least polite," she said with her head in the air.

"Is he really? How dull!" said McMorris fervently.

"I was at Tarrant Square last night," he told her by and by when she had relented.

"Were you? I'm glad. I know Mrs. Crozier likes you to go."

"Penelope doesn't. In fact she clearly blames me for your going away from them, seems to think Crozier and I share the horrid guilt between us. That's why I'm naturally anxious to know whether your friend, the witch, is treating you properly, by way of shouldering my responsibilities, you know."

"What utter nonsense!" Julien had coloured

swiftly. " I had been with them so long and I did feel that perhaps I was outstaying my welcome, but it was never supposed I should be with them all the time I was in England."

" Of course it's nonsense." McMorris gave her a friendly reassuring smile. " Fact is," he said confidentially, " I have suspected for some time that my cousin Penelope wasn't giving you a very rosy time, and, being one of the family, I had felt in a way responsible, so that I was glad for your own sake when you did go to Mrs. Cowle's. All the same I hope you won't think my aunt had any hand in Penelope's eccentricities, or that she wasn't tremendously sorry to lose you. She's very fond of you, and I know she misses you very much."

" I'm fond of her too," said Julien eagerly, " and she has been so kind to me."

She felt, as she remembered to have done once before, a sudden sense of warmth and gratitude to the young man for his friendly understanding of the situation at the Croziers, relieved too, as he evidently guessed she would be, at his word of reassurance She had wanted that, for the whole thing had worried her secretly a good deal. It was not a subject that she could discuss even with Mrs. Cowle, seeing the hospitality and kindness she had received from the Croziers, but McMorris was, as he said, one of the family, one too who had seen at least the beginning of the whole affair. She said after a moment:

" I don't really think Mrs. Crozier has a very rosy time either, and that's why I'm glad you go there pretty often. Pen is not very—sympathetic—and it's hard on Mrs. Crozier that she can see so little of Tony."

" Rum chap! I wonder why he allows her to be kept away from him like that."

" Why, do you think he could help it? " enquired Julien, to whom such an idea had not occurred.

" Oh well, he's pretty able-bodied, isn't he? Still it's not my funeral," said McMorris with all a decent man's reluctance to depreciate another fellow.

But the reluctance was so obvious that Julien felt

sure he did not altogether admire Tony. She was sorry and wondered why.

IV

Julien was soon in the position, it seemed to Frances, of being tossed backwards and forwards between the two young men, Tony having the field on Sundays at Lavender Gardens, and Julien's club night at Notting Hill, George being in possession at all the small festivities which Arthur Standish, true to his word, proceeded to engineer. And it had to be admitted that Julien seemed to enjoy all these occasions with indiscriminate energy, emerging clear-eyed at the end. And why not? Frances, anxiously watching over the girl, fearing and planning for her, had still her lucid moments when she laughed at herself for a weak-minded fool. Julien was merely a visitor to England, and in a few months she would be going home to the other side of the world—(going home, there was the sting)—to a different life and to other ties. Like a black cloud the knowledge was there before Frances Cowle, but she thrust it aside. For years very resolutely she had held herself from looking back. Now she would not look forward. For the moment Julien was hers, and every care or fear, every little worry she might bring, Frances knew herself strong to meet and ready to welcome.

In this spirit watching the little drama of Tony and McMorris, she was inclined to think that however little Julien might be aware of it, the real advantage lay with the latter. He and Julien laughed and talked together a great deal, were frankly confidential and friendly, and always glad to see each other. Tony was confidential and friendly and talkative too, but sublimely took these adjectives to himself, while Julien was expected to be the delighted audience, a laudable feminine position no doubt, but not likely to appeal for long to a girl of any spirit.

CHAPTER XV

THE GLASS CASE

" When, all at peace, two friends at ease alone
Talk out their hearts,—yet still,
Between the grace-notes of
The voice of love,
From each to each
Trembles a rarer speech,
And with its presence every pause doth fill."

Walter de la Mare.

I

ACCIDENT presently put the official sign and seal on Julien's presence at Lavender Gardens. The Cliffes came home from abroad to find their eldest son sickening for appendicitis. Although they were still ready to welcome Julien and do their best for her, they were frankly relieved when she hesitated to inflict herself upon them at such a time, and glad to know that she was being well looked after.

" I knew you would put up with me a little longer," she said in telling Frances of this sudden change of plan, and Frances, triumph in her heart, admitted that it might be possible.

" I hope the poor little chap will get over it," said Julien, " they are such jolly children."

" Yes ? " said Mrs. Cowle without enthusiasm. She refused, it seemed to Julien, to take the slightest interest in the Cliffes or their ailments, and the girl could never quite understand why. She was equally unresponsive about the other Australian friends Julien had in London, notably Harry and Olive Curtis, and by and by the girl began to realise with some bewilderment that her talk of them was clearly unwelcome.

She had seen nothing of the Curtises since her visit to the flat, but one afternoon when Frances had some

literary function to attend she telegraphed to Olive to meet her for tea in town.

"You might have asked her here," Frances said when she heard of the arrangement, "that is why I gave you the study, so that you could have your friends there without being disturbed."

"I should like to ask Olive some day when you're at home, if you don't mind," said Julien. "She'd love to meet you."

"Oh nonsense! If I am to believe you, the whole world is thirsting to meet me."

"Of course it is, but you won't believe it. Besides I know you would like Olive and Harry too. They are rather uncommon."

"I'll take your word for it, Julien, but I'm not a very sociable person and I don't care to make new friends."

This was final though not convincing, and Julien gave up the puzzle as she went off to meet her friends.

She was a little afraid that Olive would disappoint her, but on arrival found her already waiting. She was wearing a set of new furs, and when Julien admired them explained with evident indignation:

"That's Harry, of course. He's frightfully extravagant, for ever buying me things I don't want. I was so annoyed about these that I refused to wear them until to-day."

"But they are lovely, Olive."

"So is the moon I daresay, but I don't want people to dash off and buy it for me, especially when I've one at home in my trunk already," declared Olive with heat.

Julien had chosen a tea room that she and Penelope had discovered, high up in an inconspicuous building. It was called the Lotus, and the name was chiefly exemplified in the languid young ladies in pink frilled aprons whose one aim seemed to be to avoid the customers as much as possible. There were also a dado of wilting young women with purple hair and pallid complexions and a futurist picture that appeared to represent an Egyptian gentleman kicking his wife downstairs, while an earthquake, very naturally, went

on in the background. Beneath this, in bold black type, hung the stark announcement " Bovril and Toast," but its connection with the picture was uncertain. In spite of these dubious attractions the room had one advantage which the management had so far carelessly forgotten to include in the tariff. One of its small-paned windows looked out on Piccadilly Circus, the centre of the world.

To the foreigner, whether from Glasgow or the world's end, there is no place in London that so inevitably represents the wicked old capital as his grandfathers (adventurous but repentant) have pictured it for him. Here where the flower-women sell their fat bouquets round the little flying angel that never gets away, all London riots by. There is no other name for it, for even the sober-minded pedant must riot when he gets into Piccadilly Circus, which always seems to be dashing away to keep a perfectly thrilling appointment somewhere, and cannot wait a minute. Then night creeps over London and it suddenly awakens to the fact that it is a circus and lights up and brings out all the necessary glitter and tinsel to attract its patrons. And the flower women and the angel see some star turns.

This winter afternoon Julien and Olive arrived to find Piccadilly Circus declaring it was night already, all the lights flaring and even a few preliminary items on the programme going forward to suit such youth as theirs. There was a fiery snake for instance that coiled and uncoiled round nothing in particular; there were hordes of motor buses charging from seven directions at once, setting to corners politely with taxis and private broughams, then dashing jovially on to dance another figure with the lesser traffic of the suburbs.

" Now we can watch the fun," said Julien, " even though we are rather near heaven. We want that flying machine Harry promised to invent for us, to call and take us home."

" Harry's working himself to death," said Olive vehemently, " and looking like a ghost, but, of course, it's no good remonstrating with him. You might as well argue with a steam-roller and be done with it."

"How are the inventions getting on?" enquired Julien.

"I know nothing about the beastly things except that I wish they were all at the bottom of the sea."

"Which really means that you think they're the most marvellous things in the whole world."

Olive laughed and gave a little sigh that was half impatience, half relief.

"Oh, I don't care," she said, "he *is* clever if he's twenty times my husband. I'm not a love-sick imbecile that I can't be sane about it and know whether he's a fool or not. I am as sure as ever I can be of him, Julien . . . I know this new thing will be tremendous—and even if it isn't the next one will, but Harry won't believe I'm sure. He thinks I'm just saying it to be polite, a thing I've never been to him in my life."

"Do you mean he isn't sure of it himself?"

"Oh dear no. He's quite sure but he seems determined nobody else shall be. Men are such selfish creatures," declared Olive with an air of having made a profound discovery. "The fact is Harry ought to have married some soppy little fair-haired fool with eyes like soup-plates instead of me, and the funny part of it is that he treats me exactly as though he had. Really, Julien, you'd think I was the most colossal idiot unhung and incapable of lifting my little finger without assistance. Harry actually went and engaged a maid for me last week—the old grandmother! I can tell you I sent her flying, but I had to pay her a month's wages first. That's the kind of reckless extravagance he lets me in for. I'm beginning to think men like silly wives because it gives them such a complacent sense of superiority."

The last part of this sentence was so suddenly audible that Julien looked up, and there coolly taking a chair beside them was Harry himself.

"Most of 'em get silly wives whether they want them or not," he growled.

"I told him he could come, Julien," explained Olive

hastily. "If you don't like him he can go away when he's had some tea."

"No she didn't," Harry contradicted in a dark tone, "she said I couldn't come, so here I am."

"Thinks I can't go home alone," Olive pointed out, "there you are, you see, soppy wife again. He's heard that when a man marries he ties a mill-stone round his neck, and he thinks he ought to act up to it."

"And when a woman marries she thinks she's tied herself to the mill-wheel and has to go on grinding for the rest of her life," said Harry.

Julien burst out laughing.

"Now I know what's the matter with you both," she said, "you're trying to warn me against the horrid pitfalls of matrimony, and you really do it rather well. Have you quite finished, because if so we might have tea."

Later, as they went out into the Circus together, Olive was separated from them for a moment by the crowd. Harry turned his short-sighted gaze appealingly on Julien and exclaimed:

"I say I wish you'd try and make Olive see sense. She's working like a navvy for no earthly reason. Don't you think she looks fagged to death?"

"Oh, Harry, I've never seen her looking better."

Harry glared at her.

"She told you to say that," he said suspiciously, "I might have known it. Girls are all alike."

"She didn't tell me anything of the kind," said Julien, "and even if she had do you think I wouldn't say so if I thought she looked ill? I happen to be rather fond of Olive though she did marry the most bad-tempered man I know."

"Yes, but if she were on the verge of the grave she'd never admit it. She's so obstinate," said Harry. "Still if you think she's all right—"

He was evidently relieved, for he added, peering about him:

"Where in the world is she? What a silly ass she is to go and lose herself like this—might be two years old."

That at least was a healthy sign. Abuse in Harry always was, and Julien went home a good deal relieved and very superior over the foolishness of people in love.

II

She went to see the Croziers soon afterwards, moved thereto chiefly by her recent talk with George McMorris, for Penelope's replies to her occasional letters since she left Tarrant Square had been distinctly acid in tone, and she was none too sure she would be welcome. She realised, however, that as George had said, Mrs. Crozier was not at any time to be identified with Penelope's eccentricities, even though on one memorable occasion she had been goaded into a gust of maternal suspicion by her daughter. Julien uneasily remembering that incident, wondered whether Mrs. Crozier had heard of her latest association with Tony, and thinking it improbable, decided to speak of it herself by way of carrying the war into the enemy's quarters. This was all the easier because Penelope was not at home when she arived, nominally at all events. Julien was none too sure from Mrs. Crozier's slightly fluttered air that she was not in reality sulking upstairs. At all events Tony's mother received Julien's news of her darling with evident delight.

"Now that is nice, my dear!" she exclaimed, "so you're helping the dear fellow with his good work? That is clever of you and you'll be able to bring me news of him often, won't you? You don't know how I miss him, but there, Tony always was a real mother's boy."

"I'm sure you must miss him dreadfully," said Julien with eager sympathy, "and it's very hard on Tony that he can see so little of you. Don't you think you could come to his club with me one night, Mrs. Crozier? It's really tremendously interesting."

"Oh, my dear, I couldn't possibly. Not a word," said Mrs. Crozier in her most mysterious tone, which Julien instantly supposed to be a reference to Mr.

Crozier and perhaps Penelope. But she continued, shaking her head :

"No, the dear fellow wouldn't hear of it. 'No, Mater,' he said in his jolly way, 'the club is all very well for me to knock about in but I can't have you coming down there.' Ah! Tony always looks after his old mother, Julien, and so self-sacrificing as he is, as I often tell Penelope, working down there among those poor creatures day and night, but dear me she won't believe it of course. Penelope is like that. 'Doing his little bit' he calls it and says it's the least we can do, but it isn't much I can do, Julien, my dear, for I'm not clever like Tony, and for the life of me I shouldn't know what to say to these people. Still there's one thing I can do, though you'll never mention it to Penelope, will you? I let him have what little I can—it's only £1 a week I'm sorry to say—to help the good work along."

"Oh, Mrs. Crozier, I think that is doing a great deal," said Julien in admiration, "it is generous of you and it must be an enormous help."

"Hush," said Mrs. Crozier in her confidential semi-whisper, "part of my dress allowance, my dear. I put it down to clothes, for of course his father would never hear of such a thing. But what do I need with these new-fashioned skirts and rubbish? Far better to let the money go to Tony for his poor people."

Afterwards when she thought it over, Julien was a little bewildered by this mention of Tony's poor, for the young man's talk of his work and the club had never presented them to Julien in the light of a charity, nor had her own small experience at Notting Hill borne out that idea. She was inclined to think it would be extremely distasteful to Tony to hear himself referred to as a kind of patron and Lord High Bountiful of his poor dear girls as he called them, but she concluded this was only Mrs. Crozier's rather muddled view of a situation she had never seen at close quarters. The question of the money puzzled her a little too, but she could not help feeling it had been rather fine of Tony to say nothing on this point as to what, through his

mother's aid, he was able to do. No doubt his silence was partly due to a certain delicacy in seeming even to hint to her that financial help would be welcome. Well at least there was a little bit she also could do in that direction. It would be a good way of spending the salary she was earning with such outrageous ease, and she determined eagerly to keep her eyes open and sound Tony as to what it would be most useful for her to do.

She told Frances the story of Mrs. Crozier's generosity the same night, adding :

" Poor Mrs. Crozier, it's really very hard on her for she adores Tony, and can only see him when his father is out of London. I wanted her to come to the club with me but it appears Tony won't allow that."

" Allow it ? Good heavens," said Mrs. Cowle drily.

" Oh but it is quite on her account of course. He says he can't have her knocking round there. Tony takes the greatest care of his mother really."

" I wonder if Master Tony will take care of his wife in the same way ? "

Julien looked up with a half-laughing protest.

" Why are you so scathing about the poor boy ? " she said. " Don't you like Tony ? "

" He seems quite a delightful person, but that doesn't say he may not be one of those dear creatures who cherish a fond superstition that it is their duty to shelter their women-folk. That always seems to me such a neat excuse to keep them out of the way. As if any woman worth while wanted to be sheltered and shut away in a glass case. People may tell you that type of man is old-fashioned but don't you believe it, Julien. He is a hardy perennial."

Julien laughed.

" Oh but of course one would hate to be sheltered and shut away," she exclaimed eagerly. " If people care for each other they should be chums."

" Julien, Julien, you are very young."

" Why, do you mean you think they never are ? "

" I think it has sometimes happened to very fortunate people," said Mrs. Cowle slowly.

"My father and mother are two of them, then," said Julien looking into the fire, "they are the best pals in the world."

There was a short silence. Then Frances said in a voice that sounded to Julien a little bored, "I don't think you have told me much about them, have you? I suppose your—mother helps your father with his political work?"

"No, that's the funny part of it," exclaimed Julien, "mother refuses to take the slightest interest in politics; in fact she laughs at them or pretends to. But after all I don't know that father really cares so very much for them himself, although I used to think he did. He has been in Parliament ever since I can remember, and in the Ministry for years, but last election somehow we didn't get him in. I can never imagine how it happened even now, but he was—rather badly beaten. Yet he was tremendously jolly about it. I believe I cared more than he did."

Julien made this announcement almost as something too absurd to be believed, but Mrs. Cowle did not seem to think so. She did not look at Julien but she said in a low voice:

"Oh my dear, my dear, it is a mistake to care too much about things."

Julien gave her a quick glance, half grateful, half surprised. She had again that indefinable sense of understanding and sympathy that had assailed her so often with regard to Mrs. Cowle, and seemed always to be built on a foundation, the very slenderness of which made it the more unaccountable to the girl. But even more surprising still was the light it continually threw upon her own mind and feelings and perplexities. Hitherto, Julien had never considered these things very much. She had led too active and full a life for introspection, but now that the fact was clearly presented to her she saw the truth of it. She *did* care about things, intensely, eagerly, and however mistaken that might be, she was none too sure of her power to alter it. And after all didn't it really make life more worth living?

"And yet," she said to Frances, "I'm sure you care for things very much yourself."

Frances laughed with odd bitterness.

"It is a very long time since I cared much for anything in the world," she said. She wanted to add: "Anything but you," but the words would not come, and if they had she knew they must sound wild and possibly mocking to the girl.

Julien went on in her persistent way:

"For your work at all events. Oh of course I don't know, but I've always thought it would be impossible to make a success of anything unless you cared about it tremendously."

"Yes, I suppose I have cared for my work. I've enjoyed it at all events, although in the beginning it was a matter of necessity rather than choice."

"Was it really? Do tell me about your early struggles."

"Oh, my dear child, there is nothing much to tell. When I was a year or two younger than you I found myself alone in the world with a little money, less than £100. I had to do something and as I had always had a certain amount of aptitude for writing, I tried that. I had no experience but then I had no distractions either, for I knew nobody. It wasn't easy of course and I had a pretty hard time for five or six years at least. Then my luck began to turn. One of my books was a success, then a play. That brought a good deal of money, and a friend I met about the same time invested it for me and made more. So it has gone on. It is not a very thrilling story you see, just bare and unromantic."

"You didn't live in a glass case at all events," said Julien.

Frances smiled.

"No, in one room," she said, "most of the time. It wasn't much bigger but at least it was of my own choosing."

"What a good thing you didn't go and marry when you were left alone in the world, or you might never have written at all."

Frances glanced at her quickly. Then she laughed.

"Ah now I see you are insinuating that matrimony is the glass case," she said.

"Didn't you mean that?"

"Perhaps I did," said Frances slowly. Like a dark cloud the days of her own marriage rushed back upon her and her whole mind was full of the old harsh passionate protest. "Ah! but it mustn't be like that for you, Julien. You are different," she said.

"Not emancipated I hope?" enquired Julien with a little grimace. Then she added: "I'm afraid if I got into the glass case, I should promptly smash it, you know."

"Yes, that is exactly what I did," said Frances involuntarily.

In a moment the girl was beside her, and she felt, with a rush of mingled happiness and pain, the strong young comfort of her arms.

"Dearest, I didn't know," she said.

"No," said Frances holding her tight, "I didn't know either, Julien. I thought the man I married was the finest and most splendid person in the whole world. He wasn't of course. He was small and weak, but even his weakness had nothing fine about it because he was too blind, too utterly satisfied with himself, to know it or understand. I could have helped him. I tried, but he never saw that either. He would have laughed in his charming way at the idea. There wasn't a single place where I could really touch his life. Don't marry that kind of man, my little girl."

"No," said Julien soberly, "I won't."

III

A few mornings later Harry called her up on the telephone.

"Look here! have you heard from Olive?" he enquired aggressively.

"Not a word. Why?"

" I thought you might have. I say, Julien, things are anyhow. I—I wish you'd come over here if you can spare an hour. Could you meet me in the Gardens opposite the flat ? "

" In the Gardens ? You're awfully mysterious," said Julien in a tone of amazement, " but of course I'll come as soon as ever I can get across."

She rushed upstairs, found that Frances was busy and did not need her, and set off at once, taking Spiders with her for a run. Spiders of course was in his element. He rioted up the road, his short tail flapping and his ears cocked for adventure, returning to Julien at intervals for admiration and attention. For once both were so conspicuously lacking that he grew concerned about it, sniffed appealingly round her feet, and at last sat down in the path and gazed at her in sorrowful protest, ears folded and tail at rest. Julien looked at him absently at first, then laughed and caught him up in her arms.

" Oh, Spiders, we must hurry," she said, " and see what's the matter with those two poor lunatics of ours."

Spiders, with a pious air of resignation, submitted to have his lead put on, be carried on top of a motor bus and even hauled past a thousand glad adventures in the enchanted country of Kensington Gardens. His expression plainly said he was a beast of understanding.

One of the small West gates of the Gardens not far from the Round Pond commanded the entrance to the Curtis's block of flats, and here, his eyes glued in that direction, Julien discovered Harry walking dejectedly up and down. When she spoke to him he jumped with sheer nervousness.

" What in the world's the matter, Harry ? " exclaimed Julien, shocked at his haggard face.

" Are you sure you haven't seen or heard from Olive?" enquired Harry, glaring at her suspiciously.

" Of course I'm sure. Is something wrong ? "

" She's gone."

" Gone ? Whatever are you talking about ? You must be crazy," declared Julien. " Gone where ? "

" I don't know where. That's just it," said Harry in a spiritless voice. " We had a—row, it was the day before yesterday and I went out in a rage. When I came back she'd gone, just coolly walked off, and I don't know where she is."

" Do you mean to say she didn't leave any message ? "

" Oh she left a note, mostly about how I was to get my meals. Damn the meals, do you think I care about eating, with Olive goodness knows where ?—in London too. Why, anything might happen to her and I'd never know. I can tell you, Julien, I have been pretty well crazy with anxiety. Then I thought of you. You're the one person in London she might have gone to or told. I went out yesterday and hunted for her at the hotel we stayed at and one or two places, but of course it was no good, and you can't go round asking people if they've seen your own wife. Then when I got home I could have sworn she had been in the flat while I was away. The fool caretaker woman came up in the morning with breakfast and said she'd been told to look after me while Mrs. Curtis was away. I told her to go to hell and cleared her out in a hurry. But when I came back last night the place was all fixed up, and the woman said she'd not been near it. Besides no one had a key but Olive. I'm sticking here in case she goes in to-day, but my beastly eyes are so jolly short-sighted I've nearly chased the wrong woman twice already."

Harry's tone was an almost comical mixture of rage and misery, but Julien thought she had never liked him better.

" Don't worry too much," she said, " I'm sure Olive will come round. It's very bad taste of course, but she's rather fond of you, Harry. And meanwhile if you want to lie in wait for her wouldn't you be better off in the flat than out here in the cold and damp ? "

Harry, however, had a theory on that subject. He was convinced Olive would not put in an appearance until he was reported safely out of the building. She could easily ring up the caretaker and find out, and he was stubbornly determined to wait here at a safe

distance while there was any reasonable possibility of seeing her. Julien asked if he had made any enquiries of the caretaker, but it seemed he had not. As he justly remarked it looked so jolly fishy not to know the whereabouts of your own wife. After consultation it was decided that the same ignorance on Julien's part would not be likely to excite comment even in a caretaker, so leaving Spiders in Harry's charge, she went to interview that luminary. But the caretaker was not to be seen, and having rung her bell in vain, Julien walked upstairs in search of someone from whom to extract information. Having reached the door of the Curtis's flat on the third floor without meeting anyone, she was just going to turn back when she became distinctly aware of someone moving about inside. She listened to make sure, then knocked loudly. The noise ceased but nobody opened the door. She knocked again and yet again, with the same result, then, certain that it was Olive and not the caretaker within, calmly sat on the stairs and proceeded to wait events.

Five minutes passed, ten, fifteen, and there was no sign of anyone. The situation was so ridiculous that Julien began to chuckle—Harry in the park watching the entrance like a detective, Olive creeping guiltily about her own flat, and between them an apparently sane and responsible member of society solemnly sitting on the stairs!

"Melodrama up to date," said Julien to herself. At the same moment a noise behind her brought her to her feet just as the door opened and Olive came out. Seeing Julien she stopped short in awkward amazement.

"Julien, what in the world are you doing there?" she exclaimed.

"Waiting till you condescended to answer my knock," said Julien placidly. "As you took some time, I thought I'd sit down and rest."

"D—did you knock? How funny?"

"Yes, isn't it? So unusual."

"But it's so queer I didn't hear you," continued

Olive hastily. She stood still against the door, clasping the handle with nervous fingers. "Look here, I'm awfully sorry, Julien, but I have to go out," she said.

"Without your hat?" enquired Julien with interest.

"I—my hat's downstairs."

"Oh well, you'll give me your new address before you go, won't you?"

"I don't—know what you mean."

"Oh yes you do."

Julien caught her by the arms.

"Olive," she said, "I've seen Harry."

Olive tried to shake her off.

"I wish people would mind their own business," she said furiously.

"I suppose Harry thinks you are his own business."

"I didn't mean Harry."

"I know you didn't."

The two girls looked at each other, Julien faintly smiling, Olive scarlet and defiant. Then all at once she pushed the door open violently and disappeared inside.

"I wish you'd go away," she said in a muffled voice, but Julien, taking no notice, followed her and closed the door behind her. Olive had flung herself down by the dining-room table, her red head in her arms.

"Look here, old girl, don't you think you'd better tell me what's the matter," said Julien perching herself on the table beside her.

"No I don't. Since you're in Harry's confidence you probably know too much already."

"I am not in Harry's confidence and he simply rang me up because he was half mad with anxiety about you and thought I might know where you were. I came here to see if the caretaker knew as a matter of fact, but if Harry had told me forty stories it wouldn't make any difference. You surely don't suppose I'd take his part against you, do you? even if I have known the Curtises all my life. Harry is the one member of the family who was never a friend of mine."

This guileful depreciation of Harry had an instant effect.

" He's by far the best of them anyway," said Olive raising an indignant head.

" Evidently—since you can't put up with him," replied Miss Archer, gently sarcastic.

Then Olive burst out laughing and put her head down on Julien's knee.

" You're—you're a persistent little beast," she said.

" Yes, aren't I ? " said Julien stroking her hair.

After that little by little it all came out. It seemed that Harry had invented a contrivance for conserving the petrol in air-craft to anything from six to twelve times its normal capacity. Olive poured out a flood of technical details and explanations that set Julien's head whirling, but it was clear that if successful the thing would be of considerable value for long-distance flights.

Harry had come to England fondly supposing it would be a simple matter to get one of the big aircraft factories to take it up, but he had no influence in such quarters, would have scorned to use it in any case, and it was not surprising that unromantic British business men, true to type, should look coldly upon an untested invention brought to them by an unknown young man. with nothing but a " Colonial " training behind him. The last reproach was the worst of all. " Colonial " training like American, is always used as evidence against the unwary who bring their intellectual or technical wares to England. Naturally ! These young countries have the insolence to use new and up-to-date methods which we, in our conservative might, do not even intend to think about until the week after next. In short they insist upon teaching their grandmother to suck eggs, and the dear old soul hates such precocity.

In Harry's case the difficulties were the greater because it was found that his contrivance had to be built into the 'plane before it could be adequately tested, and this meant outlay. Eventually a Northern firm had offered him certain facilities, and he and Olive had decided to give up their trip to the Continent on the way home and use the money for the invention instead.

The summer and the money had both been spent in unsuccessful experiments which had however been of immense benefit to Harry, and he had now, to the best of his belief, perfected his contrivance and was ready to try it again. Meanwhile, Olive had secretly taken a hand by writing her trustees to cable her some more money seeing that it would be certainly needed for the new experiments, but on its arrival two days ago Harry had flown into a violent rage and refused to touch it, saying he wasn't going to have her people saying he was living on his wife.

"Living on me indeed?" exclaimed Olive, "he's perfectly crazy on the subject. He's been worrying himself to death because it was my money we used on the first experiments. You'd think I was some stranger he had robbed, and when I tried to economise in the house by doing little things myself, he made no end of a fuss and always ended up by buying me all sorts of silly things I didn't want. But that rubbish about living on me was the last straw and I can tell you I was in a rage. I determined that if he was so afraid of what people would think on that subject he could live by himself, so I packed up some of my things and cleared out. Of course when I calmed down I knew I didn't really mean to stay away; he's so helpless, Julien, but he'll have to come to his senses about the money. Says he'll get someone to go shares in the chances of the thing and put down the necessary cash. Why, he hardly knows a soul in England, and besides, what right has he to let a stranger help him before me? It—it makes me furious."

"But where are you in the meantime?" enquired Julien, "and what are you doing up here?"

Olive grinned.

"Swear you won't tell Harry."

"I believe you'd tell him yourself if you could see how wretched he looks."

"Swear you won't tell until I say you may."

"Oh, all right, you hard-hearted creature, I won't tell."

"Then I'm downstairs," said Olive triumphantly. "I couldn't go far away; he never takes the least care of himself, and I knew he'd never have his meals properly so I made the caretaker believe I wanted my husband to think I'd gone for a holiday because he was worried about my health, and she managed to get me a room in the building. Now I can see they send him things he likes from the restaurant, and when he's gone off to town I come up and put things in order in the flat. He's so blind and absent-minded I know he'd never guess I'd been here."

Julien smiled to herself but said nothing. She had been wondering whether she should tell Olive how Harry was spending the morning, but decided that if she did Olive would in her present obstinate mood, refuse to go outside the door for days. So after a few more protests she said good-bye and hurried back to the Gardens.

Harry, who had spent an arduous hour with Spiders and was now grasping him by the collar, greeted her morosely.

"Haven't really come back, have you?" he growled, "thought you were leaving me this beast for good."

"Poor old Spiders," exclaimed Julien releasing him, "if your Uncle Harry isn't civil we shan't tell him any news, shall we?"

"I say, did you really hear anything?"

"I did and Olive is perfectly all right, and I'm sure she'll come round if you have patience, but she won't let me tell you her address."

"But where did you see her? Oh! I suppose she is on the telephone?"

"Clever boy! Why aren't you equally sensible about Olive's money?"

"You don't understand. No decent fellow is going to live on his wife. It's my business to take care of her."

"Oh rubbish, anyone would think you were an early Victorian Englishman," exclaimed Julien impatiently. "No decent girl marries a man to be taken care of

whatever she may have been forced to do in the dark ages. Olive at all events would be the last person to do anything so mean and soppy. I'm sure I don't know why she did marry you, but I suppose it was because she cared enough for you to share your life. I'm beginning to think men don't know what sharing means. They want a monopoly, whether in giving or taking. You don't know evidently or you'd let Olive pay for the invention. Don't you think she has more right than some casual stranger to share the honour and glory of it when it's a success, to say nothing of the profits ? "

" I never thought of it in that light," admitted Harry gloomily, " besides it may not be a success."

" Then think of it now," advised Julien in her most grandmotherly manner, " and I'll go home and let you. Good-bye, Harry, if she hasn't relented by lunch time to-morrow ring me up and I'll find out that she hasn't gone into a decline or anything for you."

" I say, it's awfully decent of you, Julien," said Harry, and Julien with Spiders at heel was gone.

IV

But she felt sorry for Harry and she was none too sure that her sage advice would be very convincing to him when he came to think it over. Julien was wise enough to realise that the evidence of people we have known all our lives generally leaves us incredulous, and she began to plot to enlist Mrs. Cowle's aid in reducing him to reason. She at least could not fail to impress him, the girl decided, and in her usual headlong fashion of taking Frances' aid and interest for granted, she rushed into a recital of the morning's adventures during lunch. She had strong hopes that Frances would suggest asking Harry to dine with them, and be lectured that evening, which would be so much better for him than moping at home, but here she was doomed to disappointment. Frances indeed, not unnaturally,

received the suggestion that she should interfere in the matter with undisguised amazement.

"My dear child, these Australian friends of yours are nothing to me," she exclaimed, "nor I to them, and they would have every reason to resent my interference. I couldn't possibly intrude upon anybody's private affairs like that."

"I suppose I must be naturally interfering," said Julien dolefully, "and I thought after our talk about sheltered women the other night, you would be interested."

"So I am interested in theory, but I am certainly not going to rush in where angels fear to tread, and interfere with things that don't concern me. It is all very well for you who are an intimate friend and fellow countrywoman of these young people."

There was silence for a few moments and then Julien said slowly:

"You don't like my country very much, do you?"

"Like your country?" said Mrs. Cowle in amazement —"what do you mean?"

"I have a feeling that you don't," explained Julien, "from several things you've said. You are always so scornful when I suggest you must come there some day, for one thing, and I notice you never care to meet my Australian friends."

Frances felt her colour rising and the fact annoyed and embarrassed her.

"You're talking preposterous nonsense," she said with some irritation. "What possible reason could I have for disliking a place I know nothing about?"

"Oh, dearest, I hoped you couldn't have any reason," declared Julien laughing a little ruefully. Then she added: "Somehow people here are so patronising about Australia and 'Colonials' as they call us, which, of course we are not; but you never make those mistakes, and yet I imagined you didn't care about it. What the other people think doesn't trouble me in the least. They don't count, but you're different."

This little appeal and the smile that came with it

were too much for Frances and she rose abruptly from the table, putting an affectionate hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Of course I hate your wretched country," she said with a rush of tenderness. "Isn't it going to take you away from me one of these days?"

"You haven't got rid of me yet," said Julien catching her hand and laughing. "If it were not for my mother I'm none too sure you ever would."

Frances laughed too, but she looked straight before her, her eyes dark with a sudden bitterness and pain. A kind of futile rage possessed her against this woman on the other side of the world who held the girl's affections. *Her mother* indeed? She wanted to cry out against it, and she had to hold herself in with an iron will to prevent some mad avowal. Julien, curiously sensitive to this silent agitation and quite unable to believe the only solution that presented itself, held the other woman's hand and said nothing. From the beginning Mrs. Cowle's kindness and evident affection had filled her with a still wonder as something almost unbelievable, and she could not imagine now that her coming and going could really mean so much to her either way. After a little while she said:

"I don't want even to think of going away for ages and ages yet."

"No," said Frances, "don't let us think about it."

But of course she did all the afternoon, for at once she was conscious of a new danger in her relations with Julien, and this danger was herself, and what, in one of these rather terrifying moments of emotion, she might be tempted to declare. She had had once or twice during the past years a more or less desultory impulse to tell her story to Arthur Standish, but the overwhelming desire of this occasion had been something entirely different, born too of far more powerful motives. She was too honest not to admit to herself that to-day it had been the mention of the other woman, the softness of the girl's voice when she spoke of her, and the whole clear picture of their attachment that had so enflamed

and shaken her. She wanted passionately to be first with Julien, to do everything in the world for her, to give her whatever her heart desired. And here the conversation at luncheon returned to trouble her, for had not Julien thought her critical of her country and unsympathetic about her friends? She began to think over the matter of Harry Curtis and his invention, and by and by evolved a plan to convince the girl she had been mistaken.

They went that evening to Buckingham Gate and she spoke to Arthur Standish quietly on the subject, giving him, as far as she was able, a brief outline of the young man's invention, and the difficulties he had encountered.

"I don't know these young people," she said, "and my interest in a mechanical contrivance would look far too palpable, but I'd like to help a little on Julien's account. A man on the other hand might naturally be expected to take an interest in such things, and I want you to look up this young Curtis and offer to finance the experiment, of course without mentioning my name in the matter. I particularly don't want to be mixed up in it at all."

"Why not let me do it on my own account?"

"No, certainly not."

"Oh, very well," said Mr. Standish in a resigned tone, "I shall run off with the profits behind your back. I never expected to be asked to play philanthropist for you, Frances, but it seems I have even come to that."

Frances smiled and looked across the room at Julien, the centre of a noisy group.

"I'm afraid Julien is the philanthropist," she said, "she is for ever thirsting to help lame dogs over stiles, a thing you've never seen me do I'm sure. And yet once upon a time I had just those impulses, and I suppose that's why I want to help Julien now. You see mine were rather effectually knocked out of me."

"So it seems," said Mr. Standish gently sarcastic.

V

Next morning, Julien, greatly excited at her news, telephoned to Olive that Mr. Standish would probably call at the flat during the day about the invention. Olive, torn between elation and wonder, exclaimed :

" You're a witch, Julien. You simply wave your hand and the thing is done."

" Nothing to do with me," said Julien, " in fact I hardly even waved my tongue. I just happened to mention Harry and his uncanny machine, and it seems Mr. Standish is interested in that sort of thing. By the way where is Harry ? "

" How should I know ? " enquired Olive, suddenly chill.

" Well, would you like to know, Olive dearest ? "

" I am not in the least interested."

" Because," said Julien guilelessly, " it's such a damp and miserable morning that I'm sure it can't be really good for him moping out there in the park."

" Park ? What park ? "

" Kensington Gardens, rather. He spent yesterday at the gate watching the entrance to the flat in the hope of seeing you go in. And he was going there again this morning."

" He's mad," said Olive vehemently, " he'll have rheumatic fever in a minute."

" Exactly what I thought," said Julien and chuckled as she hung up the receiver.

Olive, finding herself cut off, went cautiously to the door and looked out, and there sure enough was a familiar figure walking moodily up and down. She ran upstairs to the flat, found pen and paper, and wrote :

" When you've quite finished getting pneumonia, rheumatic fever, consumption and housemaid's knee, perhaps you'll learn sense and come home to lunch. Olive."

Then she added a premeditated afterthought :

" P.S.—It seems I am not the only fool on earth after

all. Someone wants to take up that infernal machine of yours, and as it's a man and a stranger, and not your wife, possibly you'll condescend to let him do it. He is coming to see you this afternoon.

P.P.S. Oysters for lunch."

Harry, receiving this choice document at the hands of the caretaker's small boy, was at the flat in two minutes. He found Olive, her back to him, dusting the dining-room with elaborate care.

"Oh, good morning," she called blandly, "have you been inventing a machine to blow up your wife?"

"Have one already," growled Harry, "in my mouth."

Olive grinned in private.

"I hope they looked after you nicely while I was in Paris," she said politely.

"Have you been to Paris?" enquired Harry with interest. "Funny I didn't miss you."

"Liar," said Mrs. Curtis, smiling at him over her shoulder. Then seeing for the first time his haggard face, she threw her duster across the room.

"Oh Harry, you old silly," she said.

CHAPTER XVI

TONY'S POOR DEAR GIRLS

" To nobody second
I'm certainly reckoned
A true philanthropist."

W. S. Gilbert.

I

On her next club night Julién tried to get some information from Tony regarding his poor people, as Mrs. Crozier called them, but she did not find it easy. Tony indeed with his all-pervading charm of manner, his obvious delight in one's presence as the very thing needed to complete a satisfactory world, was yet a little difficult for ordinary conversation because he was used to the centre of the stage, and quite incapable of taking any other place. Indeed it clearly never occurred to him that anyone might want him to try. A survival of the good old days when every properly brought-up woman's first function was that of admiring audience to the men of her circle, Tony had hitherto found, by some happy accident, enough feminine survivals to complete the picture and keep him thoroughly pleased with himself and the world at large. But Julien was not of these. Tony's self-sacrificing spirit had delighted and thrilled her. Tony, outcast and abused for his principles and taking it all with such blithe good temper and unconcern, had won her secret admiration, but she was not disposed to sit at his feet or hang upon his words, never having been brought up to these proper and praiseworthy feminine antics. On this occasion his solo performance bored her for the first time, but all her efforts were unable to stem it with any success until they were almost at Notting Hill. Then she managed to remark :

" I went to see your mother on Monday afternoon."

" Good for you," said Tony in kindly commendation. " Cheer up the poor old mater, what ! Yes, that speech of mine took an hour and twenty minutes, and the audience stood it like Mary's little lamb. Awfully decent lot, fell on my neck, wept down my collar and all that sort of thing."

" I wanted your mother to come to the club with me sometimes," persisted Julien, " but she seemed to think you wouldn't like it."

" Oh dear no," said Tony hastily, " I can't have her bothering her head about the club. Never do, you know. She's not their kind."

" Am I ? " wondered Julien to herself, " and who are ' they ' ? " Aloud she said : " And yet I'm sure she'd love to help you. She's so kind-hearted."

" Lord yes," said Tony, " dear old Mater, she'd give away her head if the Pater didn't hold it on for her, always has been like that. I'm devoted to her."

There was a pleasant air of virtue in this admission which escaped Julien because she was wondering why her carefully planned remark had not called forth the admission of how much the dear old mater was doing already. After a little while she said :

" By the way I've been wanting to ask you, are there any funds or anything connected with the club where a little contribution would be any use ? "

" Not on your life," said Tony with vigour, " can't possibly let you do it, Julien old girl. Don't think of it, you're doing quite enough already."

" Indeed I'm doing nothing at all," said Julien, " and if you were a proper Socialist you would encourage me to give away the money I don't need. Not that I'm so horribly affluent, but you see Mrs. Cowle gives me a salary."

She threw this in expecting him to protest that she was doing some poor girl out of a billet, but Tony had none of these uncomfortable little theories.

" Oh that's all rot of course," he said, " giving away your cash and so on, quite the old-fashioned idea of

Socialism. I've never met anyone who had it as badly as that yet. Most of us have a sight too little for ourselves."

"And aren't there any funds then?"

"Not a fund." Tony smiled down upon her with a benign and fatherly air, as though she were a small and anxious child. "Don't you worry about the club," he advised her kindly, "you're doing your little bit and helping us no end. That class of yours is going to do a lot for my poor girls, and they're as keen as mustard about the work already. You should hear the yarns I've heard about Miss Archer. She's just the thing, I can tell you."

Julien laughed, but she had to admit to herself that she had been rather obviously patted on the back by Tony without getting any nearer the matter in hand, and by this time they had reached the club entrance so that there was no more opportunity for private discussion.

II

After all there were other ways of finding out what she wanted to know. Julien had just decided to consult the invaluable Reg on the subject, when Tony remarked:

"Here are some of 'em now," adding breezily to a little group in the vestibule: "Well, girls! In good time as usual I see! Here's Miss Archer come along to lend you a helping hand again. Now I hope you're going to give her a tip-top welcome, you know!"

His tone was humorous and several of the girls giggled obediently, but the quiet girl standing in the background lifted her haggard eyes and stared at him for a moment, silent and critical. Julien catching the glance, went over to her with a friendly smile.

"Have you got along with it better this time?" she asked, seeing the shorthand book under her arm.

The girl turned her eyes upon her and for a second they seemed to take in every detail of the other's dress and the warm friendliness of her young vivid face.

"Well, as to that I don't know I'm sure," was all she said in a harsh, abrupt voice.

This girl, Rose Burton, was the same who had caught Julien's attention on her first visit to the club. She was tall and ungainly and had a pale hard face, and eyes that looked upon the world with a kind of secret anger and contempt. While the other girls called Julien "Miss" at frequent, and to her mind, too obsequious intervals, Rose called her nothing at all and did it defiantly though with a certain air of triumph too. She never spoke of any subject outside the lessson but of that she asked persistent questions, as though secretly determined to get the better of Miss Archer sooner or later. Julien at first amused, then slightly annoyed and finally curious about her, had asked Tony for enlightenment, but he was vague.

"The Burton girl? Oh not up to much, I fancy. Surly sort of creature, isn't she?" he said. "One does meet that kind sometimes and they're the deuce. Ungrateful too. Don't waste much time on her sort, Julien."

But that was exactly what Julien was tempted to do. Rose was intelligent. All her affectation of stupidity could not hide the fact from this girl of her own age, who promptly gave her more attention than the other careless members of the class, for which favour Rose was openly ungrateful.

"How are you getting on with the typewriting, Rose?" Julien asked her this evening as they went upstairs.

"Me?" said Rose in an injured tone. "Oh first rate of course. I've got £10 to chuck round on typewriters to practise on, haven't I? Any little thing like that."

"I suppose the practising is rather awkward, but Mr. Crozier says you can always use the club machine."

"Him? Lot he knows about what I can or can't do," said Rose contemptuously. "I don't work for me living? oh, no. One of the aristocracy I am, born lazy, heaps of time to tear about clubs after typewriters."

"I must see what I can do about it for you," said Julien.

" Well you can't do anything," returned Rose darkly, " so what I advise you is don't you try and then you won't be disappointed."

Julien received this advice in meek but amused silence, for the conversation had given her a sudden idea and she determined to act upon it. Why shouldn't she give the club an extra type-writer, Tony notwithstanding ? That at least would be of use.

She had a further encounter with Rose Burton during the evening, for, according to arrangement, Mrs. Hodges brought in a tray of tea and cakes when the class was half over and set it down on the table before her.

" Five of you. That's right, isn't it, my dear ? " she enquired beaming.

" Quite right, Mrs. Hodges, thank you," smiled Julien, and added apologetically to the class : " I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind if we had refreshments at half time. I'm just longing for a cup of tea."

The other girls grinned at so welcome a diversion from the business in hand, but Miss Burton moved her books out of the way with a bang.

" Don't they give you any at your place then ? " she enquired suspiciously.

" We have it rather early," explained Julien. She passed a cup to Rose but the girl drew back.

" I don't require any, thank you," she said with dignity, " I have me tea before I come out and I 'ave me supper when I go 'ome, and I don't eat between meals."

Rose dropped the aspirates with an almost audible thud and Julien was immediately certain she had done it on purpose.

" Oh Rose, couldn't you strain a point just to keep the rest of us in countenance ? " she said appealingly.

" I don't require any, thanks," said Rose again with emphasis and went on writing.

Julien flushed, and seeing Reg pass the door at this moment, called him to hide her own embarrassment.

" Won't you come and have tea with us, Reg ? "

she said, " if you can spare five minutes. Rose doesn't care for any and I shouldn't like Mrs. Hodges to think it wasn't appreciated.

" Well I don't mind if I do," said Reg dropping an armful of books on a chair inside the door and joining them at the table. " Just the thing these cold nights. Thank you, Miss Archer."

Reg at all events was not offended at the suggestion, and Julien gave a little sigh of relief. She had ordered the tea with the best intentions in the world, partly to please Mrs. Hodges, partly because she was privately sure some of the girls could have very little time to go home for a meal between the hour of leaving their work and getting to the club. At the same time the very thought of seeming to patronise or pity them filled her with dismay, and later when the class was over she decided to consult Reg about it. Somehow Tony, as adviser-in-chief, had lost his virtue for the moment.

" I'm afraid I rather offended Rose Burton by offering her tea," she explained to the young man as she waited for Tony, " but I do want to make the class as attractive as possible and I thought it would be a little break to have refreshments. I wish you'd tell me if I've made a bad mistake, Reg, because I'm not very experienced."

" Of course you're not," said Reg confidentially, " not but that you're a great success if I may say so without seeming to flatter, Miss Archer. As for the tea, why you do just as you like and let them take it or leave it. Some of these girls are that obstinate."

" Perhaps it's just that Rose is a little independent ?"

" Well," said Reg, " I believe in being independent myself, but I'm not what you'd call rabid on the subject. And I happen to know a bit about Rose Burton. She's a neighbour of mine and I've got to admit she's prejudiced."

" Do you mean against me ? "

" Well no, what I mean to say is against your kind Miss Archer. Rose's father, he's a gentleman, one of the sort that don't believe in work. There's lots like

him. Her mother who was just a working woman kept him for years, and now she's gone, Rose pretty well does the same. That kind of thing makes a girl rather funny-tempered and I suppose she doesn't feel she owes her father's kind much, and she's not going to owe them as much as a cup of tea if she can help it."

"Poor girl, what a shame!" exclaimed Julien. "I don't wonder she's prejudiced. . . And yet she comes to the class?"

"Ah, there you are," said Reg, "she's getting her own back, you see, and after all the class is one of the benefits of belonging to the club. She's paid her subscription and she's not beholden to anybody."

"Of course not—but I didn't know you had subscriptions."

"Why yes, we're much like other clubs," explained Reg, "but very likely you wouldn't know much about such things. We're luckier than most in owning the premises, which were left to the A. W. S. ten years ago for holding meetings and that. Having to put in a caretaker and the place being more or less furnished, well the club kind of grew out of it, don't you see? The girls' classes, they're a new idea, Mr. Crozier it was thought of them, and we have them here two nights a week, the rooms not being wanted. What with subscriptions and letting the hall for meetings occasionally we manage very well. The A. W. S. runs the place."

"The A. W. S.? Oh! that's Mr. Crozier's society, isn't it?" said Julien, and Reg answered that in a manner of speaking he supposed it was.

III

Going home Tony held the floor without protest, while Julien said "yes" or "no" at reckless intervals, and her thoughts were far away.

Since the club was self-supporting she could not see what became of Mrs. Crozier's weekly contribution, and while this was clearly none of her business she

had an uneasy feeling that perhaps she had inadvertently found out something she was not intended to know. But quite apart from that the various brief conversations of the evening had given her something to think about. From the general confusion one thing was clear: Tony's picture of his "poor dear girls" and the little bit kind souls were doing to help them, had been, either through his stupidity or hers, about as mistaken as it could be. The club at Notting Hill was certainly no charity and the people whe went to it, poor enough no doubt in many cases, had as much right to their independence as Tony himself. That he could possibly have been blind to this seemed to Julien incredible, yet it was ridiculous to suppose he had purposely misled her since she would be bound to find out the truth very soon. Looking at him critically as he sat beside her in the tube, she found him for the first time a little overpowering in his jovial satisfaction with all the world, had a sudden suspicion that he was one of those happy individuals who set their own stage with an imaginary throng and blandly expect the audience to find it peopled.

IV

Julien had not after all mentioned the matter of the type-writer to Reg, and now, fearful of giving offence, she decided to go very warily before venturing to do so. She did however speak to him on her next visit to the club regarding Rose Burton's difficulty about practising.

"She's a clever girl," she explained, "and ought to have a chance to get on. How can we manage, Reg? I'd willingly get a machine for her to use at home if we could do it without hurting her feelings."

"Don't you trouble to do that," advised Reg, "because we've got an old typewriter here in the office that is quite good enough for the purpose and there's no objection I can see to its being loaned out if Rose likes to take it home. At the same time it's my belief she's been coming here regular in the dinner hour to

practise. Mind you it's only from what Mrs. Hodges tells me, which I repeat seeing that you're interested in the girl, Miss Archer. I don't want you to think she's not appreciating all the trouble you take."

"It isn't any trouble at all," protested Julien. "In comparison with you for instance, what do I do? Why I believe you're here every night, Reg, and Mr. Crozier tells me you're invaluable to him."

"Oh well I wouldn't say that you know. He's a bit inclined to be enthusiastic, Mr. Crozier is, not but what it's quite a good thing in its way. What I mean to say is that you mustn't take him too literally, as the saying is, Miss Archer. As for me, the club's a hobby of mine. I've grown up in it, don't you see. Many of us have."

"Oh!" exclaimed Julien impulsively, "what insufferable impudence you must all have thought it on my part to come interfering then! You are quite right about Mr. Crozier, he's so enthusiastic, and I suppose I was stupid, for I didn't in the least understand the kind of club it was. I thought you were in need of people to come and—and lend a hand with the classes."

"Well, we're not exactly in need of them but of course we're glad of any assistance we can get in that way," Reg assured her eagerly, "just as we're glad if people will lecture for us and speak at our meetings. And you being a friend of Mr. Crozier's we took it as most natural and kind. As for Rose Burton I happen to know, though I wouldn't like you to say I mentioned it, that your help means a good deal more to her than she will let out. It's like this, once she can get a chance to better herself, she'll be able to cut right away from that precious father of hers."

"Oh will she?" exclaimed Julien. "I'd like to think I'd helped her to do that."

She went on to the class-room more cheerfully, and found Rose Burton already there at work.

"Good evening, Rose," she said, "Reg has just been telling me he thinks there's an old type-writer in the club that you can take home to practise on if you like."

"Oh yes, while me maid brushes me hair, I suppose?" said Rose with sarcasm. "He and the club can keep their type-writers for some fool that's got time to waste, not me, thank you."

Julien took off her hat and coat and sat on the edge of the table where the other girl was working.

"I thought you wanted to learn type-writing?" she said pleasantly.

The soft folds of her dress were close to Rose's hand and she moved away from them impatiently.

"Well, isn't it what I come here for, just as you come because you want to marry that pink and white fool of a Crozier."

Julien jumped down from the table and turned upon her, eyes flashing and cheeks on fire.

"You are extremely impertinent," she said.

"Ho, am I?" said Rose, "that may be a matter of opinion too. Perhaps there's some that thinks the shoe's on the other foot—swanking down here among decent working people, doing the patronising fine lady."

"If you feel like that about it why do you come to the class?"

Silence.

Julien returned to her seat on the table.

"Now look here, Rose," she said, "I've never patronised anyone in my life and I hate that sort of thing quite as much as you do. As for Mr. Crozier, he and I live at opposite ends of the earth, so you see what you suggest is perfectly absurd. But he is a friend of mine and it isn't very civil of you to call him names in my presence."

"All right," said Rose defiantly, "if you don't like it chuck me out!"

"It seems to be you who are chucking me out," said Julien. "It is your club after all, and I'm merely an outsider who has no business here as you've just politely told me."

"I say what I mean," said Rose darkly, "not being a *lady*."

There was so much scorn on the last word that Julien laughed.

"Oh come," she said, "it isn't fair to boast of your advantages, and if you are not really keen to learn type-writing why do you always spend your lunch hour at it?"

"Been spying, have you?" said Rose unpleasantly. "It's me own business what I do with me lunch hour, I suppose."

"Yes, and it's my business to find out whether my pupils are practising. However, since you object to me as a teacher I must see if Mr. Crozier can't get someone else."

"Don't trouble on my account," said Rose just as the other girls came in, and the conversation had to be abandoned.

But Julien's interest was more than ever aroused, and her fighting spirit with it by the opposition of the other girl. She had been for a moment as amazed as she was furious at the reference to Tony, but both sensations faded very soon because the whole idea was too preposterous to matter in the least. As for the rest of Rose's insolence, in the light of her story it was easy enough to understand. The girl was paying to the best of her ability the class that had betrayed her. She would injure her own chances of advancement rather than pander to one of them, and Julien secretly liking her spirit became all the more determined to put in a word for the other side.

When the lesson was over, she kept Rose behind to show her some extra work, and that done, enquired with a faint smile:

"Is my fate decided yet? Do you want me to give up the class?"

"No concern of mine," returned Rose with dignity.

"Yes it is, because you are the only member of the club who seems to object to my presence."

"Me?" said Rose in a tone of meek astonishment. "I'm sure I wouldn't presume."

"Rose, you're a fraud! Of course you'd presume as

you call it. Isn't it what you're doing all the time and glorying in it too? But what have I done to you after all? I'm just another girl, much like you."

Rose glanced significantly from Miss Archer's pretty delicate figure to her own shabby one.

"Don't look altogether like sisters, do we?" she suggested drily.

"Now you're judging by appearances. The fact is you think I look down upon you because you earn your own living, which is a big mistake, and you're equally determined to look down on me because you think I don't earn mine, which is a bigger mistake still. As it happens I am a private secretary and I earn £40 a year. It isn't much, is it? I daresay you earn more yourself, and even if you don't now you certainly will when you're an expert typist."

"Pooh," said Rose. "You earn your living indeed? Play round at it I daresay because you think it's clever. Don't do it to keep your lovely father, do you, because he's too busy being a gentleman to soil his fingers?"

"Oh Rose, why do you do it?"

Rose gave her a quick look and laughed harshly.

"Why do I do it," she mocked, "because he'd jolly well knock my head off if I didn't, that's why. Pretty isn't it? nice and respectable and gentlemanly. Oh you needn't talk to me about gentlemen. I'd rather have a thief any day."

"But can't you get away from your father?"

"Oh yes, easy. Go to Park Lane or Buckingham Palace, eh? How do you suppose I'd get the money? If I took a week's wages and cleared out he'd come to the place where I work and make a shindy. He's done it before now and it was all the worse for me. But just let him wait till I get this shorthand and type-writing off by heart, and a chance of a billet at it, and he'll see no more of me."

"Would you let me help you to get away now?" offered Julien eagerly.

The other girl looked at her in amazement, and for a moment the hardness had gone out of her face.

"You precious infant, what will you want to do next?" she said grimly, "get me into an orphan asylum or a home for stray dogs?"

Julien grinned.

"I'm afraid I haven't any influence in either direction," she said, "but I could lend you the money to get away to the other side of London and help you to find something to do. Of course I haven't any influence there either, but I believe some of my friends could do it easily."

"Yes," said Miss Burton slowly, "I shouldn't wonder if your friends would do a good bit for you. You're that kind. You haven't even suggested I should go home and do me duty by me father, have you? Oh, I've had that said to me before now by some of your—*ladies*. Duty indeed? There are times when I've been tempted to do me duty by the world and pitch him out of it. That might be a Christian act. However, I'm not going to let you worry your head about me. You just go on helping me with the shorthand and typing and I'll get away of my own accord one of these days. And look here, I called you a lady but I take that back. You're not. You're far too decent."

Julien laughed and held out a friendly hand.

"Thank you," she said, "I believe that's the nicest compliment I've ever had."

Rose, gathering up her books for departure, said after a minute:

"Was it true, what you said, you know about him—your pink and white friend."

"Mr. Crozier? Quite true. I've never thought of such a thing for a moment, and I'm sure he hasn't either."

"Well, take my advice and don't you think about it whatever he does," said Rose.

"Poor Mr. Crozier, why don't you like him?"

"Oh he's all right I daresay for them that care for that sort, but you wouldn't!"

"Now, Rose, you're not going to tell me you think he

is a gentleman?" expostulated Julien in laughing imitation of the other girl's scornful tone.

And Rose answered drily:

"Just you let him hear you suggest that he isn't and see how he likes it. That's all."

V

So Penelope was not the only person who had suspected her of designs upon Tony. Looking back upon that showing of claws, Julien was able to smile at it now as something ridiculous and far away, but she could not help wondering whether any other member of the club had shared Rose's views on the subject, and if so how much Tony's rather possessive airs had had to do with it. He was, she had to confess, a little inclined to display his wares—and his friends.

She thought of Reg's statement that because she was a friend of Tony's her presence at the club had seemed quite natural to them all. That in the light of after events might be significant.

She glanced at Tony as he strode cheerfully along beside her, and smiled in the darkness. He at least had no such nonsensical suspicions or desires and after all what did the other people matter? In a few months more she would be back on the other side of the world, at home, and this friendship, pleasant as it was, merely a thing of the past.

"I say, Julien!" exclaimed Tony confidentially at this point, interrupting her meditation, "I know you'll do me a favour, won't you?"

"Why, with pleasure," said Julien, and her voice was all the more friendly because she was thinking of her imminent departure.

"I knew you would," declared Tony, beaming his most possessive smile. "Fact is I want you to talk round Mrs. Cowle and get her to do something for me. The A.W.S. wants to have a bit of a fizz up early in the New Year, meetings you know with prominent people to

speak at them, and all that. Well, it's part of my job to grab some of the speakers, and if Mrs. Cowle would only come along one night and hold forth for us, it would be no end of a feather in my cap."

"I'm afraid she won't do it, Tony. I'm not even sure that she can speak in public," said Julien, "besides she's a Conservative."

"I don't know so much about that," declared Tony. "It's my opinion that plenty of your Conservatives are good Socialists at bottom, if they'd just take the trouble to think things over fairly. And besides that doesn't matter in the least. Look here now, I'll give her a subject, The Progress of Woman, real tip top theme that is, and one she's specially qualified to deal with, being one of the most prominent woman writers of the day. We'll put the political aspect out of it altogether if she likes, tell her, and leave it at that—'The Progress of Woman.'"

"I'll ask her, of course, Tony, but you mustn't be hopeful," said Julien again.

"Why, of course I'll be hopeful." Tony laughed with easy confidence. "I'm sure you can pull it off for me, Julien old girl. You'll only have to coax a bit and she'll do it for your sake and you'll do it for mine, and there we are."

To this ultimatum of course there was no answer and Julien received it meekly and in silence. She was glad of the darkness however for she was filled with a perfectly insane desire to laugh.

CHAPTER XVII

LOVERS' MEETINGS

Love like a gipsy lately came
And did me much importune
To see my hand, that by the same
He might foretell my fortune."

Robert Herrick.

I

As Julien expected, Frances received Tony's modest suggestion first with amazement, then with laughter, and refused to consider it for a moment. She had never, she said, spoken in public, and did not propose to begin such antics now, and she made this announcement with the vehement irritation to which the girl had quite grown accustomed. But in spite of her promise to Tony Julien was not disposed either to argue or protest, and she received her friend's ultimatum with her usual good temper.

She had noticed that she often, by some chance word or action, ruffled Mrs. Cowle, but of course she could not suspect any significance or connection in these occasions. Equally of course the other woman had her moments of terror lest she should do so, succeeded by the inevitable impulse to do any earthly thing Julien might desire. She was possessed by a morbid fear lest any harsh remembrance should dim the girl's future thoughts of her, and side by side with this there marched the conviction that her every little act, every impulse of tenderness, must reach and pass that invisible standard set by a woman she had never seen. She did not realise yet that this was the one comparison in the world Julien would never think of making. To her Mrs. Cowle was still the artist, and her friendship one of the glorious adventures of a pleasant world. Julien was even young enough to think her generosity to Miss

Holland, for instance, her aid in the matter of Harry and Olive and various other little acts of kindness to which she had in reality been impelled almost against her will by her secret relations with the girl herself, the final proof of her "greatness." At least she found Mrs. Cowle in these particulars all that a really "great" person should be, and it was doubtful if she would ever see her in the more ordinary capacity of a woman, intensely self-centred, nervous and irritable to a degree, and more than a little terrifying to her dependants and subordinates.

Tony's request with regard to Mrs. Cowle had had in the girl's eyes a faint hint of presumption, and it was only another reason why she should not press Frances into his service though she did remark with a twinkle in her eye:

"He was so anxious to save you trouble that he even chose your subject, dearest, 'The Progress of Woman.' Do you like it?"

"Immensely, the dear mediaeval young man, but where does he think we have progressed do you suppose? In our capacity to be useful to his sex?"

"Oh, I am sure Tony would never want that," said Julien, her loyalty up in arms. Then she added: "Personally I don't mind being useful to them in the least, but I should mind its being expected of me as a kind of divine right, wouldn't you? I don't think I should ever regard it as the end and aim of existence, for instance."

"When I was young and foolish I thought it might even be that, if one really loved the man," said Frances slowly.

Julien, considering this, said after a while:

"I don't believe I could ever love a man who expected it—or would allow it."

"No," said Frances, "because you were born in the revolt against just such conditions." Then as the girl looked at her, she added hastily: "I mean your generation of course. You belong to the new order whose mothers were probably rebels against the Victorian convention."

" I've sometimes wondered if my—mother were a rebel perhaps," said Julien remembering an old talk with McMorris.

" Do you mean because she left you behind and—died over here away from her friends ? " said Frances in a tone that she tried to make steady and matter of fact. She had a continual impulse it seemed to her to lead the conversation to such quicksands as these, and having done so, to stand shivering at the edge. But Julien blissfully insensible, returned :—

" Oh no, why, poor darling, she was ill and I don't suppose she had any choice about that."

And Frances as she rose and turned her back, said eagerly :

" I'm sure she hadn't."

" My argument was that I simply couldn't have had a meek Victorian mother," continued Julien chuckling, " for there's nothing meek about me, now is there ? "

" Thank heaven, no," said Frances with vigour.

II

This conversation gave her a further sense of security with regard to Tony Crozier, and the quality of the spell he might be able to exercise over a girl of Julien's temperament became less ominous in the face of it. Yet she was relieved that with the approach of Christmas the connection would be broken for the moment. She had her periods of bitter humour at her own expense when from time to time she realised how much she fostered and hugged to herself these anxieties about the girl, gathering up as it were the ghosts of responsibilities that long ago she had killed with her own hand. But even ghosts may be comforting so she gave them free rein and rejoiced when she and Julien were safely on the way to Fields for Christmas, and Tony was left behind.

The party was to be quite a small one, the only other guests being McMorris and the young Curtises, the

latter addition being, as she had somewhat grimly to admit, the outcome of her own interference on their behalf.

Arthur Standish's first visit to the flat had been followed by many more, for he had found there several things that surprised and pleased him. A man who, all his life, had found with one exception, his pleasure in things too easily attainable, he had no personal ambition, few convictions, fewer prejudices and lived an easy, indolent existence, looking on at a world run mad with the energy he did not possess. But the man who looks on has an unfailing eye, and the genius of this young engineer from the ends of the earth was soon clear to him. Once in his long-ago boyhood he had had a fleeting enthusiasm for mechanics himself, and he found it rather pathetically resuscitated as he followed the technical explanation of the young man's devices. Several of these seemed so promising that he sought an expert opinion and presently found himself pledged to see them through, and he was a good deal surprised to find how great an interest the connection soon became to him and how little for once this had to do with the original driving force in the person of Frances Cowle.

This enthusiasm was secretly encouraged by that uncompromising and bespectacled personage, his sister-in-law, who was one of the few people to give to Arthur Standish more than a pale and rather patronising affection. Herself one of those brisk and cheerful women who spend their lives doing things of no importance with a great deal of energy, she had married, after a more than lively girlhood, the quietest and most conventional man of her acquaintance, finding infinite entertainment ever afterwards in the knowledge that she had so completely sold the prophets of her spectacular youth. Her husband survived for six bewildered but entertaining years, and departed from her lively presence with regret, leaving her with Ida and his own young brother, then a boy at school. So Arthur Standish became a kind of second-hand son of the house, a position in which he had continued ever since out of

sheer indolence as she frequently, and none too politely, pointed out.

"You are a slacker by nature, upbringing and inclination," she would tell him triumphantly, "I have no patience with you. And you needn't tell me Frances Cowle is responsible, for that is melodrama, which only happens in the best regulated families."

Standish who had no intention of telling her any such thing, greeted this perennial remark with his slow smile.

"Oh come now," he protested once, "think how useful I've been to you all these years, to point a moral and adorn a tale. I wouldn't deprive you of your only aim in life for the world. Of course it isn't much of an aim, but then your sex is a notably bad shot at any time."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Standish drily, "all men are authorities on my unfortunate sex I notice. It's the one subject they know anything much about, but somehow none of them can ever explain how they came by the information. Men have been diligently asserting that we are weak-minded fools, for centuries past, but after all anyone can make assértions. Centuries hence I daresay we shall have retaliated so long and ardently that they'll make an equally affecting picture, poor dears. In the meantime even a weak-minded fool would tell you it is better to aim at a pigeon and shoot a crow than let your gun get rusty and your target fall to bits."

"Not to mention your metaphors! Then you think it's better to have shot and missed than never to have shot at all?" suggested Mr. Standish amiably, "Well, I'm willing to take your word for it, Helen."

Mrs. Standish's sympathy although so deftly concealed beneath invective and denunciation, was perfectly clear to him because one can learn a little even about the people with whom one lives in twenty-five years. Therefore he was not altogether surprised when his sudden interest in Harry and Olive Curtis provoked in her an instant desire for their society.

Mrs. Standish, though her looks belied her, said she

was bored with life. She had run out of types and wanted some new excitement, particularly as Christmas approached and most of her protégées were seized with a horribly banal allegiance to the families that didn't trouble their heads about them during the other seasons of the year. So Olive and Harry were invited to Buckingham Gate on several occasions, and finally included in the Christmas party at Fields ostensibly that the two men might dabble in some experiments which they could not conduct in the London flat.

Frances Cowle heard of the arrangement with dismay. Long ago she had known Harry Curtis's father, and although she recognised that there could be no possible danger in the present meeting, she shrank from any acquaintance that might lead to a future connection with the home that had so safely forgotten her. Still there were ways to combat such a possibility, and on the drive to Fields she let even this newest little worry slip away from her in the joy of the cold grey winter morning.

She and Julien, leaving London early, motored down together, and saw old England spreading out her tidy fields to dry after a night of rain, saw the woods, like tall, grey ghosts in the grey weather, draw back their misty bed-curtains for a moment and look out, then drop them down again. They ran through villages where shock-headed little houses leaned together above the winding streets, and grey old turrets in the distance told of an England known to Norman kings. Then an amber sun turned back his piled up bed-clothes and raced with them through the windy noon, the woods were blue in the distance, the chequered fields threaded with silver, where the hand of Commerce, gentle for once, had flung out her narrow strands of water. All the pale, soft colours of the morning melted together in a haze that ran before them down the miles, delicate and elusive as a thing of dreams. Every changing tint, every breath of the clear, rich, fragrant air brought Frances Cowle a new delight. She had, to an extraordinary degree, the feeling for places and a mind

sensitive to the thousand voices of the world, the hushed whisper of the grasses, the call of trees, the busy monotone of that invisible life for ever pulsing round us, and now a sense of exaltation held her such as she felt invariably after a day of prolific and satisfactory work, a kind of pain that was yet divine and wonderful, and from which all mere human considerations were thrust away. She sat back in the car, her head up, her dark eyes suddenly spiritual and fine, and for once even the fact of Julien's warm young presence there beside her did not matter any more.

Then some little movement from the girl brought her attention back to earth, and the two exchanged a new smile, a trifle bashfully like people taken unawares.

To Julien this drive through a winter England, so different from the luxuriant beauty of the same season in her own country, was just a new adventure, but one threaded with the inevitable impression that she had known it all somewhere a million years ago. She was excited, and the wind racing beside them set her eyes dancing, and the colour flaming in her cheeks. Frances, meeting her unguarded glance, and seeing the slender figure athrob with life and all the eagerness of Youth, that greatest adventure of all, thought with a swift self-pity of her own girlhood when just such sensations, when even youth itself had been shattered and hunted down. Then passionately she knew that Julien must never be allowed to experience that desolation. It was as though her old dead girlhood called through Julien's for reparation at the hand of Fate.

And at this moment the girl said, trying to fling her mind back to normal things from the emotion of their glance :

" Poor old Tony, it is too bad he isn't coming too."

Frances was startled at the intrusion of this name of all others at such a moment and answered drily :

" No doubt he has his own friends to go to."

" I suppose he has," said Julien, " but not his own people, poor boy. Oh, if I were his mother I *would* have him with me for Christmas, or go to him myself. What

earthly right has Mr. Crozier to prevent it? No one should prevent me."

Frances smiled at first bitterly and then in triumph. So here too that old revolt was bearing fruit? And it was surely true, no idle boast. This was the spirit of to-day, young, confident and eager, before which even the force of circumstance, that greatest barrier of all, must crumble and fall away.

III

Considering this little outburst about Tony, Frances began to see that the presence of the young Curtises at Fields might prove after all a blessing in disguise because it would certainly be an added interest and diversion to the girl. Therefore, when they were presented to her by Julien she was a good deal less distant than she had intended (for her own safety) to be, even while she scorned her weakness in being thus continually moved from her original purpose by her concern for the girl.

McMorris's presence was another source of satisfaction, for she still had her curious and rather wistful faith in the young man. He was the kind of son she would have liked to have, the kind of lover she might have looked for if that particular well-spring of her nature had not been dried up long ago. To her he was still unapproachable, but it was clear that he liked Julien, and Frances was glad when she saw them go off together with the rest of the young people that afternoon, Ida having promised to take them across to Silver Ridges for tea with Archie Callendar.

Callendar lived two miles from Fields in an old mansion so tumble-down as to belie its name with more than usual success. Having lost father, mother and sisters in a boating accident some years before, he had found himself alone in the world with an accumulation of debts and an estate that did not pretend to earn its own living. Tackling the problems thus presented

had bred in him a settled melancholy, and far more important a frenzied interest in farm implements, fertilizers and other mysteries which had at last succeeded in turning the scale of fortune in his favour. Things were looking up at Silver Ridges but it would be years before the house would know more than a tattered remnant of its old glory.

The Standishes were the only neighbours with whom he had kept in touch during these years of struggle, and they were so honoured simply because they gave him no choice in the matter, being the kind of people to take not the slightest notice of his morbid unsociability. With the household at Fields he was always contented and at ease, therefore, and it had become a convention that he should spend his Christmas with them.

Silver Ridges was an old Tudor house of no great size, but still one of the finest specimens of the period in England. Callendar had a great devotion for the old place, and during his worst years had let the gardens go to rack and ruin and parted with nearly all his movable treasures to hold the bare bones of it together. When the little party arrived, he took the three Australians over the quaint old winding house, with its pathetically dismantled gallery, its secret staircase and underground passages and its long succession of dusty, echoing rooms that might in the eerie candle-light, have sheltered a ghost in every niche and corner.

McMorris and Ida, having seen the house many times before, refused to accompany the rest, but sat by the great open fireplace in the hall beneath the tall old mantel, on which were carved the Callendar arms and the date 1575. This hall was the only habitable living room in the house, for Callendar kept only a man and his wife to serve his own modest needs, and the greater number of the rooms were shut up for the sake of economy. Here, however, was a degree of comfort, and the nodding flames played on old graceful, carved oak chairs and on the gate-legged tea table, with its

burden of plate and china, that had come down the adventurous years to find even so tame a festivity as this an occasion of importance.

McMorris looked about him and then across at his cousin with lazy appreciation. Ida had thrown down her wraps, and her hair under its little soft fur hat shone like pale silk in the firelight. McMorris found himself thinking as he had often done before that Ida was really a very charming looking girl, and although he did not in the least realize it, there was something kind in the admission as though he made it at some personal inconvenience.

Still pleasurably watching the soft contour of her face, he said after a while :—

" Rum chap, Callendar; seems very set on the old place, doesn't he ? "

Ida turned her serene gaze upon him.

" Don't you think it's worth it ? " she said. " I am rather set upon it myself and it doesn't even belong to me."

" Jove, yes, it's worth it of course," agreed McMorris, " and it must be rotten luck not to be able to keep it up properly."

He had not known that Ida cared about this sort of thing, and he found himself filled with a kind of impatient regret that she couldn't have such a place if she wanted it. But before he had time to consider the matter further, the sound of laughing voices announced the return of the exploring party, and Julien, followed by the others, came running down the stairs. McMorris, catching sight of her, stood up with alacrity, and began to move the chairs about, while Ida faintly smiling watched him.

" I know we disturbed the family ghost," said Julien, " in fact, I heard him scuttle away, but Mr. Callendar declared it was a mouse—if you ever heard of anything so banal. If I were the ghost I should be most annoyed about it."

" Don't possess a ghost, really," said the sad voice of Mr. Callendar, " the best I can do is a family skeleton."

"Well, I notice we were not shown the cupboard," protested Olive, "men are so selfish. They keep all the pleasures for themselves."

"Oh come now, that's just Callendar's sense of hospitality," interposed McMorris, "he can't very well be the skeleton at his own feast."

He joined the little group at the foot of the stairs, and they all stood there together laughing, while Ida stayed where she was, looking into the fire with a little smile. By and by, Callendar strolled over to her and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, but he was silent for some time. Then he remarked:—

"I've let the Croft farm."

"Good!" exclaimed Ida. "Is it all satisfactory?"

"Seems like it. Rather more enterprising than most of these fellows. Wants to go in for pig-raising on a large scale."

"Good!"

Once more silence.

"Are you coming home with us, or going to arrive in state later on?"

"Didn't know you expected me till to-morrow."

"We expect you at once, of course. We always do."

"I suppose I could have my things sent across, but look here, who shall I have to talk to going home?"

His tone was so urgent that Ida burst out laughing.

"Are they all so terrifying?" she said, "never mind, we'll all go home in a bunch and you needn't talk to anyone unless you feel inclined. But we ought to start in ten minutes, so you'd better go and see about your things."

Archie went, and five minutes later George McMorris suddenly discovered Ida all alone by the fire.

"But where's our cheerful friend?" he asked.

Ida explained, and he protested in an injured tone to the others:

"There now, she has gone and invited the skeleton to our feast."

"Skeleton! Do you mean Archie?" enquired Ida without a smile, "poor boy, he is rather thin, isn't he."

Callendar returned soon afterwards and the party set out on the walk back to Fields. There was a promise of frost in the air and the sky was silvered with stars that hung down like little lamps in the clear weather. The shortest way home lay through the meadows and round a small wood from which the path sloped gradually towards Fields and the river, and, standing here and looking back, it did not seem that after all the old house belied its name so much, for the moon had come up behind it and all along the ridge, shining on damp tiles, on little pools of water and still unlighted windows, she had scattered the world with silver.

The young people, stopping to apostrophise the picture, went on in new order, and George McMorris found himself to his infinite satisfaction, walking in front with Julien. He was inclined to feel injured that he had seen so little of her all day, because her red-headed friend would hang about. The real fact was that Olive had not hitherto seen Julien since the encounter at the flat, and was now doubly impelled to seek her out, almost indeed to watch her. In this she was moved consciously by her gratitude and very real affection for Julien, sub-consciously by the fact that the other girl was now in the position of knowing too much, where she and Harry were concerned, a dangerous attribute in any friend of the family. Harry had, it seemed, given in about Olive's money, when it was no longer imperative that he should. "Just like a man," said Olive to hide her satisfaction. And although Mr. Standish was financing the experiments on a partnership basis, Olive's partnership had also been ratified and her contribution was being held for any further expenses that their prolonged stay in England might incur.

"I knew you'd soon bring him round," Julien said, and this tactful reception of her news relieved Olive's anxiety to some extent. Julien was clearly matter of fact and not likely to make a sensation out of other people's private affairs.

However, they were now clear of Mrs. Curtis at last as McMorris put it to himself, and he and Julien were walking together through the bare fields, while still, austere and lovely, the night looked on, and up from the sodden pastures beside the river came the soft clean scent of the winter earth. They did not talk very much but swung along shoulder to shoulder, sometimes, where the path narrowed, so close that the faint fragrance of her clothes seemed all about him. They walked quickly but the girl's step was sure, and her breath, making a little white cloud in the air, regular and unhurried. Presently they came to a stile and McMorris jumped over and held out his hand to her but she laughed and jumped lightly down beside him, her grey eyes dancing with excitement.

"I'll race you—to the other side of the field," she called tearing away, and in a moment he was after her. They were already on the Standish estate, and this field, skirting a wood, opened into the Western side of the gardens. McMorris caught up the slender flying figure but he did not pass it. He had no intention of doing that. A wind of their own making blew in their faces, the wood rushed past them like an army of sombre, great running figures. He could hear Julien laughing with excitement as she ran and the queer little breathless sound of it set his head whirling. They were at the garden gate at last, and Julien leant against it, panting and laughing.

"What a lark," she exclaimed, "I haven't had such a run since I came to England, but you know you didn't try to win, Mr. McMorris."

McMorris did not deny it but fanned his hot face with a hand all at once curiously shaky. A wild sense of exhilaration was upon him and he could feel the blood pounding in his veins.

"You *were* undignified," continued Julien chuckling, but she added wickedly, flinging the words at him with a tormenting smile, "*thank* goodness!" Then she ran off again, this time through the shrubbery in the garden.

McMorris stood quite still for a moment, then he followed headlong, saying over and over to himself as he ran: "Little devil! little devil!"

He could not see her at first for the shrubs were thick here and the path irregular, but suddenly he heard an exclamation of dismay and the next moment, rushing into the open, caught sight of her in a little heap on the grass.

"I say, you aren't hurt, are you?" he exclaimed, running to her. In his own ears his voice sounded odd and far away but Julien answered cheerfully:

"Not a scrap."

She scrambled to her feet and shook out her damp skirts laughing.

"I slipped on the grass," she said, "a sure sign that we are to walk the rest of the way in a proper and dignified manner. But that was great. I love a good run in cold weather. Doesn't it make you feel alive?"

McMorris made no answer, he felt confused and shaken, and the girl's calm voice, friendly and undisturbed as usual, and the sight of her there beside him, clear eyed and frankly smiling, struck him with a sense of shock. His exhilaration had gone now and he felt depressed, irritated, impatient, with all a man's resentment at being taken unawares. All the way across the gardens he left the conversation to Julien while he hardly listened, but said yes and no at reckless and unstudied intervals.

It occurred to Julien that perhaps he was knocked up by the run, but that idea was so preposterous and almost insulting that she did not like to suggest it. Surely she thought, he was not as soft as all that. On the Terrace they met Mrs. Cowle and Arthur Standish.

"Why, where are the rest of you?" they enquired.

"Coming along," said Julien, "Mr. McMorris and I had a race across the last field but he wasn't a bit a good sportsman. He actually let me win."

"His natural sense of chivalry, Miss Archer," explained Standish, and Mrs. Cowle added drily:

"In fact the one and only excuse for masculine failure. We're excellent cats'-paws, aren't we, Julien? Let us come in and dress for dinner."

They went off together, the girl throwing McMorris a cheerful little nod of farewell, but he hardly noticed it. He was thinking of Ida whose existence he had so completely forgotten, and he had an uneasy impulse to go back and meet her, but of course the idea was absurd, and he knew it. At last moodily he followed the others into the house and went upstairs to his own room.

IV

There was dancing that night, and Frances Cowle, after a round or two, gave in, laughing a little, to her years, and went with her hostess and Arthur Standish to the little study, presumably so called because nobody ever studied there. It was a cosy and very popular little room, opening from the more austere library and was always full of cushions, cigars, novels, newspapers and other incentives to the idle, a kind of amateur smoking-room dressed in frivolity and chintz.

Arthur Standish lit a cigar and chose his sister-in-law a cigarette, while she sat up manfully and with great determination to smoke it. She did not care for smoking in the least except as a gymnastic exercise, but she did care for the sensation her doing so nearly always created. Middle-aged and rather stout, with her large spectacles and her clothes for ever cut on an ample pattern, she looked like a very suburban and very Victorian housewife, a fact which caused her for some perverse reason, continual satisfaction. She considered a cigarette between her lips the final touch, and she had even carefully noted all the little mannerisms of the habitual smoker to make the picture more artistic, but the thing needed practice and she gave herself to it diligently and with an air of stern concentration, while the other two looked on enjoying the performance very much.

" Your little friend Julien and McMorris seem to have struck up a great friendship," said Arthur Standish to Frances presently, " or rather it has progressed as you hoped, hasn't it? How pleasantly uncommon."

" Oh do you think they have? " Frances was beginning but Mrs. Standish interrupted briskly :

" Well, why not, I should like to know? Can't you let the poor children have their little love-affairs without interfering? You haven't made such a success of your own, goodness knows! but no doubt that's the reason you feel qualified to direct other people. Now I never interfere in these matters."

Like all inveterate matchmakers Mrs. Standish quite believed this but Frances and Arthur exchanged a mirthful glance.

" But is it a love affair? " said Frances. " Oh, I'll admit I should be glad to think it was." She flushed a little nervously and for a moment there was something almost appealing in her glance. " That might mean I shouldn't have to part with her so soon, but really I'm afraid they're only friends and Julien is so lavish in her friendships. She is just as friendly—I'm not sure she isn't more so—with Tony Crozier, to say nothing of various young men on the other side of the world."

" Ah, so my beautiful and decorative nephew is still in the foreground? "

" I'm afraid he is rather. Just at present she is inclined to picture him as a poor homeless wanderer adrift in the cold world for Christmas."

" I should have suspected Miss Archer of a more acute judgment," said Standish. " I'm willing to bet Tony is having a perfectly ripping Christmas with hordes of admiring females and other items dear to the heart of his kind. Not that I know very much about the young man. He doesn't patronise this side of the family."

" Not that he hasn't tried," supplemented Mrs. Crozier flourishing her cigarette with lively enjoyment at the recollection, " but dear me we are not nearly—what's the horrible word—upper-class enough for the

dear creature. In fact we are rather common people who do as we like and dress as we like instead of being spectacular. Tony quite meant to be kind to us I'm sure but found it hopeless, and I'm inclined to think I was the chief stumbling block. Just imagine the dreadful effect my appearance would have on his friends. Can't you hear them describing me as quite a worthy old person (which thank heaven I am not)?"

They laughed and Standish added thoughtfully:

"Yes, Tony is intensely upper-class. It's his forte and he does it beautifully."

"But what about his Socialism and his slumming and all the rest of it?" said Frances.

"Bless you, that's just where his Socialism comes in. He goes over there to Notting Hill or wherever it is in his charming, lordly, well-tailored way, and dispenses his patronage and services like a kind of affable lord of the manor, and of course he makes a great impression. He counts on that, carefully arranges it in fact, and he has his uses I suppose. These Socialist people, if they are Socialists, are sure to have forty times his brains, and they use him naturally, and so everybody is satisfied. Oh yes, Socialism is an excellent background for Tony. We are not."

"Is it his Socialism that has made him quarrel with his father?" asked Frances. "Julien tells me he cannot go home because of some dispute."

"Goodness knows! Nobody knows," declared Mrs. Standish with vigour, "but I could almost love Tony for that. Anyone who persists in quarrelling with my unspeakable brother must have some good qualities."

"Mother, we've run out of music. Please come and play for us," requested Ida from the door at this moment.

"I?" said Mrs. Standish in astonishment. "My good child, I know none of your modern rag-times or fool-steps or whatever you call them. You forget I belong to that strange period when people danced the schottische and the waltz with a capital V. Nowadays you young people caper about like a set of inebriated

frogs and call it dancing. Of course if you like that sort of thing, well and good, but don't try to drag me into it. Remember my middle-aged prejudices."

Having delivered this peroration Mrs. Standish took a last puff at her cigarette and threw the remains of it into the fire with a masterly afm and an air of stern finality.

"But mother," protested Ida, "one of your waltzes with a capital V will do beautifully and we can easily two-step to a schottische. Do come along."

As she stood there in the high doorway, a tall and graceful figure in her white and gold gown, her soft hair shining, her whole air well-groomed and a little fastidious, she could not have presented a more striking contrast to her mother, a fact of which Mrs. Standish was triumphantly aware.

"Ida is such a beautiful advertisement for us," she would say, "a kind of permanent guarantee like family tombs or a column in Burke. I used to be afraid she would grow up a perfect lady, but thank heaven she developed a grain of humour and saved us all from that. She is really quite a satisfactory daughter, doesn't try to improve my mind or bring me up in the way I should go."

As a tribute to these qualities or perhaps in humorous recognition of Ida's sympathetic glance at the other occupants of the room, she presently agreed to forego her middle-aged prejudices and went off to play for the dancers. Standish and Mrs. Cowle had the study to themselves.

"So you think the little girl likes young Crozier?" he said at last.

"Oh I hope not." Frances laughed a little at her own energy, adding after a moment: "Poor Tony, he's quite a charming youth but it's all so dreadfully on the surface. I'm sure he has none of the qualities Julien would need to find in the man she cared for."

"Aren't you being complex over a very simple matter? That is one of the worst follies of this horribly analytical age. We all know qualities are the last things that matter on these occasions."

"They matter afterwards," said Frances quickly.

"Possibly! But the right woman can make what she likes of the man."

"If he hasn't the qualities to make him the right man, she obviously is not the right woman."

"There I don't agree with you. Qualities? What are they after all but a matter of opinion or a matter of temperament? This is the day of the temperament, but I'm not too sure we weren't all far better off before we knew we had such impedimenta. The right man for any woman is the man who loves her because he will care for her and that is what she needs."

"How do you know that?"

"From observation."

Frances laughed.

"Arthur, you're hopeless," she declared, "that is positively the last way you'll ever learn anything about women. Why you have the real old picturesque notion of us as a cross between cats and stained-glass window angels. You say every woman needs to be cared for, and that is the cat idea straight away, a cushion and a warm fireside and a little patronising attention from our masters. Isn't that the correct picture? Oh there are still a few women of that kind I daresay, but you forget the stray cats and the cats whose masters grow tired of them, or forget to feed them, the great army of cats that have to fend for themselves and then begin to find out that their so-called masters are only other cats after all."

She paused and threw him a little smile.

"See what you have brought down on your defenceless head," she said, "but it is your own fault. I can't let you pose as an authority on women and marriage when you obviously know nothing about them."

"That is my misfortune—and your fault," declared Standish, but he laughed and continued in a moment: "And after all we're straying from the original point. My argument is that when a man loves a woman he'll make himself anything on earth she would have him to be."

"I don't doubt he'd try, but very often that would be quite impossible."

"Now you are insinuating that your sex is utterly unreasonable."

"No, only that we are not stained-glass window saints or fireside cats. Some of us will hitch our wagons to a star even in the comparatively unimportant matter of choosing a husband," said Mrs. Cowle with smiling irony.

"Rather hard on us poor earth worms, Frances, this one at all events."

"I thought it was supposed to be the privilege of my sex to argue from the general to the particular," observed Frances drily, but he took no notice.

"You could have made anything in the world you liked of me," he said.

"Oh!" said Frances impatiently, "do you think that's what we want, what any woman worth the name wants? And is it my vanity or my pity you are trying to rouse by such a speech. It isn't true either. No woman in the world could have made anything of you because you hadn't the will to make anything of yourself. The kind of man a woman cares for is the man who will make something of himself, with her help if she can give it, without it if she can't, in spite of her if he must."

Standish got up and walked round the room softly whistling, chose himself another cigar, then stopped in front of her with a little rueful smile.

"According to all the rules of melodrama I suppose this is where the poor misunderstood hero turns on his heel and goes out to dig for gold that he doesn't want, or shoot big game or slay dragons," he suggested humorously. "I believe he also returns from the dead in the last chapter with hair a little grey at the temples and the missing will in his pocket, just in time to rescue the heroine from the villain's horrid clutches. It's an affecting picture, isn't it? Of course if you'd like me to slay dragons?"

"Please don't, you wouldn't do it at all well."

"Oh I say, I'm an excellent sportsman. Think how often I kill time."

"Perhaps you will show me how to do that one of these days. I shall want to know pretty badly when Julien goes home," said Frances, then smiled at him. "You see I'm like the rest of the world, want to take everything and give nothing."

"It's quite a good arrangement," he assured her sitting down again, "and after all I'm none too sure you aren't right and you'd have found me a hopeless case, Frances. It's very unromantic but I find life quite amusing in spite of my forlorn and jilted condition. I'm optimistic I suppose and still hope to be in at the death—of the villain."

Frances gave him a curious glance.

"Why do you assume there is a villain?" she said slowly.

"Oh well, it's so much better for one's vanity."

"A thing you don't possess." Then with rising vehemence: "Oh we skirt about this subject and talk a great deal of nonsense, you and I, but I can tell you I hate to think of your letting your life drift by in this futile, aimless fashion, and to feel that even in the smallest degree in the world I am responsible for that. I ought to have gone away to the ends of the earth ages ago."

"That would have stopped the drifting most effectually," said Mr. Standish. "It would have stopped everything else as far as I was concerned."

"Oh that is nonsense. You would have married."

"Not on your life. I'm not saying that by way of being sorry for myself, it's simply a fact. I've known only one woman I'd have cared to marry. When I meet another I'll let you know, but I've never been able to regard marriage as a kind of pastime. You spoke just now of taking everything and giving nothing, but don't you realise that you give a good deal simply by saying that?"

"Oh words!"

"Yes, words, every word you speak, the sound of

your voice, the fact that I can see you and be near you and know that I do count for a little in your life. I'm not a fool. I know it's never likely to be more than that but at least give me credit for enough philosophy to know that in aspiring to the unattainable I am at least better off than the man who merely takes what he can get."

"You don't know me. That's the worst of it. We none of us really know each other. There's Julien who talks about my goodness to her and you who say you care to be near me. And if you both knew——"

"I can answer for myself. I believe I could also venture to answer for Miss Julien."

"I believe you could too," said Frances with sudden wistfulness.

"Please don't be afraid, I'm not going to inflict any lurid confession upon you," she added, getting up and walking restlessly about the room; "and I hardly know why I'm adopting this tragic tone unless it's to live up to the heroine of melodrama we were discussing just now. The fact is I've had twenty years of peace and now I'm inclined to think I've flung it away for a few brief months of happiness. I'm not exactly used to that and I suppose I'm suspicious of it. I don't know where it is going to lead me."

Standish watching her as she moved the books about on the table, her face half turned away from him, said in a matter of fact tone:

"You mean the little girl of course?"

If it were a question she made no answer but said lifting her head:

"I seem to have resurrected all sorts of sensations and emotions that I never expected to feel again. It's quite insane of course. I'm even jealous of a woman I've never seen, because she is—her mother."

"I'm not an authority," said Standish slowly, "but after all don't you think a girl's affection for her mother is a thing so much apart that it is hardly to be compared to her devotion to anybody else?"

"Oh I suppose it is," said Frances with a flame of

colour in her cheeks and an eagerness he naturally misunderstood, "I like to think that."

With the curious simplicity of people who greatly wish to believe a thing, she took his innocent remark to herself with eager triumph. Of course Julien's affection for her mother—her own mother—would be a thing apart, and even the fact that she believed that mother dead did not matter in the least because it put the other woman out of the running, and gave her, Frances, a double claim, a double advantage.

She said to Standish with a little apologetic smile:

"Of course it must seem incredible to you that I should care so much for a girl who was a complete stranger to me six months ago, but you see I am getting sentimental and foolish in my old age. I even find it a comfort to talk to somebody about it in the approved feminine fashion, and that in itself is a hopeless sign. Poor Arthur, it is too bad that you should be inflicted by these ravings."

"So I have my uses after all," said Standish, raising quizzical eyebrows to meet her lighter tone, "even if you don't think much of me as a slayer of dragons. Ah well, I'm a good safety valve, Frances. I've rather wondered you haven't found that out before."

Frances exclaimed impulsively: "Do you think I didn't know."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FORTY-NINTH TOAST-RACK

"And the walls that ring this world about
Quivered like gossamer,
Till he heard in the other worlds beyond
The other peoples stir."

Rose Macaulay.

I

FOR some reason George McMorris did not enjoy his Christmas stay at Fields. He was extraordinarily restless and he resented that with all the indignation of a person accustomed to be superior about such moods and tenses. He had been for some time trying his hand at play-writing, so far with meagre success, but at the moment of coming to Fields he had had a new play on hand about which he was inclined to be a little more hopeful. He was furious now that he hadn't stayed in town to work at it instead of coming to Warwickshire at all, but when he thought of making some excuse and getting back to London, that also seemed a barren wilderness where nothing was worth while.

The trouble at Fields was he decided that the party was too big, and he couldn't see why his aunt and Ida had wanted to fill the house with strangers instead of making it just a family affair, after the usual Christmas fashion.

Ida, for instance, was never to be found for two minutes alone because she was always so busy seeing that her guests were happy and looked after, and George felt distinctly injured and thought she might have considered him a little more instead of allowing herself to be so monopolised. Julien Archer was also in general demand but McMorris decided he was glad of that. Whenever he thought of their race across the fields together it was with a feeling of irritation at himself, and not a little embarrassment. Much as he liked

Julien he had a secret conviction that a friendship that made him so completely forget Ida even for five minutes was distinctly unfair to her.

In spite of his belief that he should one day marry his cousin he had not hitherto felt there was any particular hurry. Now he supposed he must be in love for he could think of no other explanation of his general discontent. He decided he had better speak to Ida about it as soon as he had an opportunity, but somehow that seemed impossible to find, and he took to going for long solitary walks about the country-side, rather moodily trying to accustom himself to the prospect of giving up his bachelor rooms, and going over all the horrible publicities that pave the road to matrimony. Fields had lost its charm for him, and he found it, in this chill December weather, grey and desolate. The Avon banks were grey with the flood waters, the spires of Stratford rose grey above grey ghosts of trees to a grey sky. How any sane person could want to be in the country at such a time, passed his comprehension.

That all the other members of the house-party were so blatantly frivolous and cheerful was another source of irritation. Throughout Christmas they had behaved like a pack of children, doing all the stereotyped things with that air of bland surprise at their own ingenuity so characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon. McMorris looked on in bored superiority, found that a cold business and was injured accordingly.

"Look here, Ida, you might as well be in Timbuctoo for all I've seen of you since I came down," he exclaimed one afternoon, "for goodness' sake cut things and let's go for a walk."

"I'm so sorry, George," said Ida, "Julien will go with you. I'm sure she'd love it and Archie and I are finishing our billiard tournament with Frances and Mr. Curtis, so I can't possibly."

"Oh damn Frances and Mr. Curtis and Callendar and the billiards too. Anyone would think you were deliberately avoiding me."

"Poor George," said Ida in her most gently indulgent

tone, "you are bored aren't you? Julien dear, do come and take George off my hands. He is in a very bad temper."

Julien, reluctant to be forced upon McMorris in this high-handed manner, grimaced at Ida behind his back, but received in reply one of those expressive little confidences which girls manage to convey to each other by the flicker of an eyelid. This one clearly said that Ida had other fish to fry this afternoon, and would do as much for Julien some day, all of which was so exciting that Julien became a martyr gladly, and was soon walking with McMorris through the windy garden.

He talked to her of Ida, and found her so soothing and sympathetic that his spirits rose again and he even found himself telling her about his play. George McMorris took his work seriously, though that was the last thing one would have expected of him, because, like all genuine devotions, it was a secret thing hidden away from the cold gaze of the world. Even Ida heard nothing about it, but curiously enough, Julien Archer was different. He felt as he had done almost ever since their first meeting, her fine responsive quality and the comradeship of meeting on a level footing; and Julien, caring for every sort of aspiration with all her soul, was eager to encourage him. She told him presently of his articles in the Review, that Mrs. Cowle had given her to read, and he exclaimed:—

"I say, did she? Oh, but of course, it was my uncivil dissertation on her last book she showed you, wasn't it?"

"Oh, Mr. McMorris, were you uncivil about it?" enquired Julien reproachfully. "No, that wasn't what she showed me. She didn't even mention it, in fact; but she did say she thought some of your critical essays rather fine."

"Nasty one for me from the dragon," grinned McMorris, "coals of fire and all that sort of thing! But it really was rather decent of her not to give me away to you. The fact is, I thought the book a pose and said so, but when you know a writer personally, criticism is bound to be a little difficult, although I

fancy I manage to steer clear of prejudices. I hope so, at all events."

Clearly, he was all at once none too certain that he had—but Julien answered eagerly :—

" I'm sure you would, and of course she'd understand that. Mrs. Cowle is much too large-minded to take exception to a fair criticism. She's the most splendid person I've ever met, and I don't believe she could pose if she tried, so there, Mr. McMorris."

They laughed.

" Good old dragon," said McMorris. He apparently found Julien's loyalty to her friend attractive, in spite of its " youngness " and decided that he liked a girl who had a mind and opinions of her own, without being dogmatic, that inevitable failing of so many of the women who have escaped from the bondage of centuries and learned to think for themselves.

" I admire some of Mrs. Cowle's books very much of course," he said, " she always strikes me as being so entirely dispassionate, as an artist should. She touched a pretty high level twelve or fifteen years ago, when that sort of thing made more of a noise. Now everybody's writing novels and doing it so jolly badly that heaps of the good stuff gets swamped in the flood. To do Mrs. Cowle justice, she has never lost her head or come down to writing drivel for the mob, and she has quite a big reputation."

" Yes, and yet she doesn't seem to believe it," said Julien. " She never thinks that people are interested in her ; but I'm awfully glad you admire her after all. I was half afraid you didn't —and that would be such dreadfully bad taste. She is a darling. Ask Ida."

" Oh, I know Ida thinks no end of her," said McMorris gloomily. He was recalled to the thought of his cousin almost with a shock, and at once the old restlessness and depression were back again.

II

They found the billiard tournament over upon their return, and the whole party seated round the fire in

the drawing-room telling fortunes. Olive Curtis, as the seer-in-chief, was the centre of the group, and before her there was a little table and a mystic semicircle of cards with which she was disposing of Ida's future. Olive certainly did it rather well, gazing at her victim with piercing eyes and using all the appropriate jargon.

"Do you really allow your wife to dabble in the black arts like this, Curtis?" enquired Arthur Standish.

"I'm not consulted," said Harry. "She took care to revise the marriage service."

"Can't say I didn't warn you to beware of a red-headed virago," interposed Olive, "Miss Standish, you will receive an offer of marriage."

"So did I—from the red-headed virago," said Harry darkly. "I married her."

"Poor chap! I also had my peace of mind shattered by a fortune-teller in the days of my youth," said Standish. "So I can sympathise with you."

"Did she tell you to beware of a dark woman?" enquired his sister-in-law maliciously.

"Nothing of the kind. She told me to beware of ten minutes past seven and I've worn my nerves threadbare trying to dodge it ever since."

"There, what did I tell you? You have the ring and the Church in your lap," said Olive with a final air, putting out the cards.

"Juggling with architecture? Worse and worse," said Frances.

Ida, sitting on the other side of the table with Callendar a little behind her and Julien on the arm of her chair, looked round the company with her placid smile.

"I believe Mrs. Curtis is trying to marry me to a curate," she said.

"Don't you mean an archbishop?" whispered Julien in her ear with a swift little chuckle, and Ida squeezed her hand hard.

"Curate or not, it is coming immediately," declared Olive. "You will receive that offer of marriage in a big building."

"Does she mean Selfridge's" said Julien. "I'm told you can get almost anything there."

"Julien, are you telling this fortune, or am I?" enquired Olive sternly. "Miss Standish, your engagement will cause a dark man to shed tears."

"That won't get him out of it," Harry assured the company. "I tried it."

Everyone laughed, and McMorris protested:—

"I say, Ida, you must have some soppy friends. Callendar, I believe it's you."

"I knew someone would find that out before long," said Archie sadly. "If my feelings are going to be harrowed up like this I shall go home."

The arrival of tea at this moment upset the fortune-telling, and Callendar having moved, McMorris took his chair. Suddenly, seized by a desire to startle his placid cousin, he remarked to her in a confidential tone:—

"Would you insist on revising the marriage service?"

Ida looked at him.

"Oh, not for the curate," she said demurely.

But going up to bed that night, Julien caught Ida's eye, and finding it alight for confidences, slipped into her kimono, and, when the house had dropped into quiet, went in search of them. Ida's room seemed everywhere to reflect its owner's air of delicate, fastidious grace. All the furniture was white, the carpet deep blue. There were blue and white sprigged curtains at the windows, and deep easy chairs to match, and all the mysterious appointments of the dressing-table were of exquisite blue and white enamel. Against this background, stood Ida, in a thick, white silk kimono, her hair in two long golden plaits, and Julien stopped for a second inside the door and gazed at her admiringly.

"You look like the Lady of Shalot," she said, "or perhaps it's Evangeline."

"As long as it's not Ophelia in the mad scene," protested Ida—and they laughed.

"Wasn't it queer about Olive's fortune?" enquired Julien eagerly.

"Oh, did you think so? I thought it was a delightful fortune, especially about the curate who is going to propose to me at Selfridge's."

"Curate indeed!" Julien hugged the other girl, exclaiming:—

"Oh Ida, dearest, that heavenly old house!"

"It isn't the house, silly," said Ida; but she laughed, and her blue eyes, meeting Julien's friendly grey ones, were like suddenly opened windows looking upon a new country. "It's a secret," she said. "Not a soul is to know until you've all gone back to town."

"*Won't* you be glad to get rid of us?"

"Glad? Why of course not." Ida was as serene as ever, and, however much her brief moments alone with Archie might light the world for her, she would still go to meet her happiness unhurried and with delicate reserve.

"I believe I should like things to go on like this for a year," she confided.

"Oh Ida, you look like a transparent angel," Julien protested, "and instead you're a dark horse and a wicked deceiver. Poor Mr. McMorris, what will he say, I wonder? He talked of you all the afternoon, and I'm almost sure he likes you."

For a moment, the other girl looked startled. Then she laughed indulgently.

"Dear old George, of course he doesn't. He only thinks he does," she said.

III

In short there was nothing complex about Ida Standish, and so while the rest of her little world talked profoundly of qualities, and the right man and revising the marriage service, she, unhampered by doubts or temperaments, had seen love coming to her and gone to meet it with a smiling face. Therefore, next day, when the guests had safely departed, she went upstairs in search of her mother.

"Mother dear, I want to marry Archie," she said.

"Good gracious," exclaimed Mrs. Standish, looking over her glasses, "well, it's no good coming to me about it, my dear. I have no influence with the young man."

"As a matter of fact it's all settled," confessed Ida. "I hope you don't mind, dear, and Archie's waiting to see you downstairs."

"You don't say so? And am I to act the heavy parent and all that sort of thing?" said Mrs. Standish, with lively interest, "how exciting! But dear me, Ida, where do you suppose I'd better see the boy? It's dreadful, but we really haven't an appropriate place for this sort of thing in the house."

"He's in the little study," said Ida laughing. "Oh mother, you are pleased, aren't you?"

"Pleased?" said her mother, giving her a brisk and rather manly embrace. "My good creature, I've been wanting it for years, but I wasn't such a fool as to say so."

Then she went off with an air of relish, to interview the culprit. As she reflected, with a daughter like Ida, one didn't have this sort of opportunity every day. Now in *her* youth——

"Dear me, how many times was I engaged?" she asked herself, with a reminiscent sigh for good times past. "Was it five or seven?"

Ida following her downstairs, presently met Standish coming up.

"Where the deuce is Archie? Hasn't gone home, has he?" he asked.

"No, he's in the little study but you mustn't disturb him for a few minutes," said Ida, putting her arm through his. "He's having an interview with mother."

"Interview with your mother?"

"Yes, you see he's—he's been proposing."

"Proposing to your mother?"

Ida burst out laughing.

"Yes of course, you old silly—for her daughter," she said.

"Well I'm damned!" exclaimed Mr. Standish gently. "Ida, I never thought I should have to say it of you, but you are a hussy, and I suppose it's going to cost me a diamond tiara or a breakfast cruet. Nobody ever considers my feelings."

IV

McMorris went back to town with relief. He had not after all had an opportunity of speaking to Ida, but he reflected that she would be coming up from Fields herself in a week or two, and then perhaps it would be possible to see her without the inevitable crowd. Turning out of Paddington Station into the engaging grim of Chapel Street, and the glitter of the Edgware Road with a red sun hanging over it, and the Park like a veiled beauty at the end, he thanked his stars for London and the feel of her old enchantment in his blood again.

He met some friends in Fleet Street, lunched with them, and went to his rooms with a hazy idea of getting to work at the play, but another man came in and yarned away an hour or two, and by that time it was dark, and the desire for work had left him. He thought he would have dinner at his club, but when he arrived there, decided the place had never been so full of fatuous, chattering fools, and finally escaped to a restaurant instead. Coming out into the dim gold radiance of Piccadilly, the cold air lured him to walk, and he set off briskly by way of Regent Street, down Whitehall towards the river. At the corner of Parliament Square he paused for a moment, looking round at the line of traffic racing down the hill behind him, and at the taxis slipping towards the bridge, dwarfed by the out-flung grace of many-spired Westminster. Men like ants were passing busily across the stone-paved yard, and for once, he saw the drama rather than the irony of that. He even envied them a little their self-complaisance. He passed on slowly to the bridge and stood there looking up and down the dark shimmering body of water running like a highway through its avenue of lights. Behind him people hurried past and he could recognise the slouching footsteps of the poor, and the furtive tread of feet, respectable and shabby. The sound fascinated him after a while, and he turned to watch, shrinking back

into the darkness with a guilty feeling that he might seem obtrusive. The murmur of voices in a hundred different tones, moved by a hundred different forces, came to him, and every other minute, the clatter of the trams going by, linking up the North and South side of the river, old London and the poor, but very live relations that cling about her skirts. Inconsequently, there came to him now a picture of Fields with all its comfort and easy humour, and he was impatient with these things that had charmed him often enough. Like so many men inclined to the reflective and intellectual life, he had fallen into the habit of rather overlooking the mere human element, except where it touched his own concerns, yet this attitude of indulgent superiority was so little a genuine part of his nature, that he recognised its existence now, with a little shock. It was as though all at once he had his finger on the pulse of life, but he himself was yet unborn. He felt extraordinarily conscious of his own insignificance and out of that came a feeling of desolation as though he had lost a friend, but it brought him another sensation too. He turned and went briskly back in the direction of his chambers, urged by a curious elation and looking with new eagerness at the world that passed him by. Misery, pain and evil, all were there. They touched him almost with a sense of physical pain, but savagely he welcomed that, no longer filled by such sights with the resentment of the habitually well-fed.

Back at his rooms he took out his play and read it with mind newly critical. It was all wrong of course, and he began rewriting it under the stress of an unusual inspiration, working until well into the morning hours. At last he flung himself into bed, tossed restlessly for some time, and then slept without a break till twelve o'clock.

It was raining when he woke, with a slow, sulky, persistent drizzle that fell on the stones of the court outside in an irritating rhythm. The room was dark and the prospect from the windows unspeakably dreary.

McMorris, his elation gone, dressed and went out to luncheon, and found a Fleet Street smelling abominably of mackintoshes and drowned bananas at three a penny. The post had come in, when he got back, and as he took off his muddy boots, he surveyed the little pile of bills it had brought him with disfavour. Later, as he turned them over, he discovered among them a letter from Ida Standish, and went to the window to read it because the room was so insufferably dark.

"Must have left something behind, surely," he thought.

The letter, short as it was, occupied his attention for some minutes, for he read it several times. Then he tore it in small pieces and flung it on the floor.

"Hell!" he said.

"Dear George," Ida had written. "I'm sorry to inflict a letter upon you so soon, but as you have always taken such a brotherly interest in my forlorn spinster state, I thought you'd be interested to know I have given up the idea of spectacles and a parrot. I am going to marry Archie Callendar, in April, I hope, and I know you will be a martyr in a good cause, and help us through the ordeal, won't you?

Ever yours affectionately,
Ida."

It had taken Ida two hours to write this letter, but all her care could not have made it less the finishing touch to McMorris's weeks of restlessness and discontent. It was still raining steadily and the monotonous drip, drip of the water on the narrow window-ledge outside, the thought of sodden Fleet Street, the thought of Fields and the grey Avon waters, of Callendar and Silver Ridges, above all the forty kinds of a fool he had been, drove him to the verge of frenzy. He wanted to kick something—and did. It was his bag, still only partially unpacked since his return from Fields the day before, and it gave him an inspiration. He would clear out, get away from England and all the gaping fools it contained. It was a hole at this season anyway, nothing but a beastly

duck-pond of mud and water. He would go to Paris.

He felt more cheerful when he had come to that brilliant decision, and even began to whistle a little as he flung his play and various other odds and ends into the bag, until all at once he remembered, and pulled himself up short. It seemed rather indecent somehow. It was not until the express had carried him well on the way to Dover that he made a momentous discovery. Above his irritation and indignation and sense of injury and everything else, he was suffering from an extraordinary feeling of relief.

Possibly his experience of the night before helped him to look the matter in the face. At all events the result of that investigation was not of the kind to make him want to turn back to London. It was hardly, however you chose to look at it, an engaging picture. For years past he had been coolly regarding Ida as his own particular property, had made it, he was afraid, all too horribly clear that he had. He had been self-complacently intending to marry her one of these days when it suited his own convenience. It had never occurred to him to consult hers, or to suspect she might have other views, and now he had been gently and most effectually snubbed for his pains. He had always been fond of Ida in an indulgent, brotherly fashion. (Oh, she had presented the case very fairly.) But he knew now that he did not love her, and there was regret in the admission as at something he had neglected to do. Rather grimly he began to realise Ida's charms had increased since he learned that someone else had won them.

How much Ida had guessed of all this it was, of course, impossible to say. Neither was he going to admit that she could have guessed anything at all. He owed that, at least, to his self-esteem. And for the same reason, when, the morning after his arrival in Paris, he wrote a reply to her note, he was careful to keep up his tone of banter.

"My dear Ida," he said. "If anyone has ever accused you of tact, I beg to point out that it was a gross

exaggeration. You might have broken it to me gently, especially as you know I have always intended to marry you myself when I had time. I am very annoyed and all that, and have fled the country. When you are jilted by heartless deceivers, you always go to Paris as perhaps you have heard. I'm not sure I haven't turned grey in a single night, but these fast French mirrors flatter one so, it is impossible to say.

If that old blighter of a Callendar doesn't give you everything you want, just let me know, and I'll come home and punch his head for you. Being of a forgiving nature I shall now go out and buy you your forty-ninth toast rack.

Yours ever,
G. R. McMorris."

This effort to tell the truth in such a way that nobody could possibly believe it cheered him considerably, and he went off to post it with a feeling of relief. And there he saw Paris, pale and alluring in the winter sunlight, Paris all smiling and trimly shod.

"Good old Paris," he exclaimed, and for the moment London saw no more of him.

CHAPTER XIX

SPELLING IT WITH AN "I"

"This person's claims I should prefer immediately to settle. I'll show you how he posed and prosed."

Aristophanes.

I

IDA brought her news in person to Lavender Gardens, a few days later, at the instigation of Arthur Standish, although of course she did not mention this.

She had grown up with his little romance which had always been, as far as his immediate family was concerned, ridiculously public. Both she and her mother in fact had done their best to urge it on since the day fifteen years ago when they had met Frances Cowle, the only other English traveller in a little town of the Italian Alps. They had come there by the wrong train and stayed because Mrs. Standish liked the look of the place, and was too indignant with the railway officials to go back. Frances was taking a solitary holiday, urged thereto by overwork, and the increasing profits of her first successful play. The Standishes had seen the play, and read one of her books, but both might have been written by Shakespeare or King Solomon for all they knew or cared to the contrary, so that it was in no sense any recognition of her identity that drew their interest to her. They watched her at first, because she was a fellow Briton alone in a strange land, this dark-eyed, tall creature who was half a shy and desolate girl, half a mature and bitter-looking woman. And because their own position had always been too pleasantly secure to give them any concern for what the rest of the world might think of them, their glance was wholly uncritical and kind. By the same token they managed to break down her armour of reserve, and draw her into their little party, and for a month she moved with them about Italy, still half afraid of a friendly companionship such as she had not known for years.

Back in London she would have let the friendship drop, but the Standishes thought otherwise. About that time her identity came home to them, and Mrs. Standish promptly passed, from thinking that sort of thing more a misfortune than a fault, to making rather a hobby of celebrities, this, of course, being a deep-laid plan to persuade Frances she was of use to them.

If she was not deceived, she left it at that gladly enough. There were not so many people pining to be kind to her that it was necessary for them to do it by stealth.

That the collapse of Arthur's hopes with regard to Frances did not impair her relations with the household at Buckingham Gate was due to the determined character of their friendship for her, and it had long ago become a convention that any demand of Arthur's on Frances' behalf should be furthered as a matter of course.

The news of Ida's engagement had naturally sent his mind back rather more acutely than usual to his own affair, and from there he passed to the matter of Frances and Julien, with an inspiration. Therefore, when Ida went to Lavender Gardens, she was pledged to persuade Julien to put off her departure for Australia long enough to be one of her bridesmaids at the ceremony in April.

She found Frances at work in the library, but Julien absent for the moment, having taken Spiders for a run, and all at once she was struck by a quite unusual sense of embarrassment at being alone with her old friend in the face of the news she had to tell. It was as though between them arose the unspoken knowledge of that other romance, unfulfilled and unexplained.

"I know you're surprised to see me so soon," she hastened to say, "but please I've come to be congratulated, Frances. I am engaged to Archie Callendar and I'm breaking the news gently to my friends before sending it to the 'Morning Post.'"

"Why, Ida dear, how perfectly splendid!" exclaimed Frances, kissing her warmly, and then Ida, moved by a sudden impulse, said :—

"Oh, Frances, why can't it be a double wedding!"

It was the first and only protest she ever made on the subject.

Presently she brought forward the matter of Julien, and Frances realising very well the source of that inspiration, smiled to herself, exclaiming:—

"Oh, if we could persuade her to wait."

And at that moment Julien herself burst in followed by Spiders, and descended upon Ida like a whirlwind. She, it seemed, had no single doubt upon the subject and immediately seized pen and paper to cable home for permission to stay.

"I'm sure they'll let me as it is only about two months after I was to sail in any case," she said, then added with a little smile at Frances: "if you can really put up with me."

"I daresay I shall be able to manage that," said Frances, her face a little white. She was filled with a dreadful fear that the permission would be withheld.

II

All day after the cable had been sent this fear pursued her and she could neither work nor rest. All night she lay awake staring into the darkness which was already the darkness of the days to come when Julien should have gone home. Since there was even a faint possibility that she might be able to keep her a little longer the final loss seemed to have come nearer all at once, to loom threatening, just at her doors. At every sound she held her breath in terror, afraid that even at this late hour the reply she dreaded might be on the way. Yet one thing consoled her, Julien had been glad to stay, had not hesitated for a second when it was suggested. Surely that was a triumph.

Next morning the Australian mail was in, and Julien had her usual little pile of letters from home, one specially bulky that she kept to read till the last.

For Frances there was also an Australian letter addressed in a hand she did not know but still enough to make her catch her breath in sudden apprehension,

She pushed it aside for the moment and then found Julien smiling at her, an interested eye upon the letter.

"Can't you guess whom it is from?" she asked eagerly.

"My letter?" enquired Frances in astonished protest at such a question.

"Oh, I couldn't help seeing the writing, for of course it is from mother."

"Your mother—writing to me?"

There was alarm in the words, but the girl answered unheeding:

"You see she'd just had time to hear you had taken pity upon her poor homeless daughter. I daresay she is writing to warn you about my true character."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Frances, irritable in her relief.

She opened the letter examining note-paper and writing with critical eyes, and almost angry that she could find no fault with them.

"My dear Mrs. Cowle," the second Mrs. Archer had written, "I feel I must thank you for your very great kindness to my daughter. Her letters are full of it, and I know that her stay with you will make her holiday in England a memorable as well as a delightful one. We are naturally a little anxious about her so far from home and it is a great relief to know she has had the good fortune to make such a very kind friend, especially if I may say so in one whom we have so long regarded with admiration. If you should ever come to Australia we hope you will make your head-quarters with us so that we may have some small opportunity of showing our appreciation of your great goodness to Julien.

"With our united thanks and kind regards,

"Believe me,

"Yours very sincerely,

KATHERINE ARCHER."

Frances put this letter back in the envelope with a feeling of unreality, and for a moment she could only think how absurd it was that she should be getting any letter from that quarter. And more than she had ever

done before, she felt curious about the second Mrs. Archer, and tried to picture her from the conventional and civil little note.

"Wouldn't you like to see what she says about you to me?" enquired Julien, putting the closely written pages on the table before her; and involuntarily she looked at them. She saw that this letter began: "My darling," and immediately knew that she could not read it, and pushed it away from her with nervous hands.

"You mustn't show me that," she said, in her queer, half-irritable voice.

A double knock at the door interrupted, and Julien exclaimed:

"I know it's my cable. Shall I go and see?"

She rushed downstairs and returned in a moment waving it triumphantly.

"It's all right, I can stay," she called before she was properly in the room, and Frances said, her voice shaking:

"I'm glad."

The girl brought her the cable and she took it mechanically, but when she looked at it she thought that she must be losing her senses, for here again the words of the letter danced before her.

"Yes, my darling," Katherine Archer had cabled.

"Isn't she an extravagant parent?" exclaimed Julien, but she was clearly pleased about it and her eyes were brilliant as she gathered up her letters.

Frances, forlorn in the background, watched her helplessly. It seemed as though the other woman were mocking her, half the world away. Then she saw her own letter and thought in a panic that she would have to answer it.

"I *won't* answer it. Why should I?" she told herself with sudden passion.

III

Julien was delighted at her news, for with the day of departure drawing near, she had been more and more reluctant to leave England in spite of occasional and

very natural attacks of homesickness. All at once she was aware of a dozen interests, a dozen ties that it would be very hard to break. For some time before Christmas Frances had been steadily working at the new book which had hung in abeyance during the summer and autumn. Julien had already typed the first half of it, and it was part of her temperament that she should find peculiar fascination in that, should like to see the book growing as it were under her hand, and to know that she had had even so small a part in its final triumph. She hated the idea of giving up this work all the more perhaps because, since her father was out of politics, there would be nothing to take its place when she went home. Even now she could not think of that old disappointment without a dull pain and dismay.

But outside this she was troubled at the thought of leaving Mrs. Cowle. She had realised more and more of late the peculiar solitude of the other woman's life, her distaste—almost suspicion—of making new acquaintances and dimly she was aware of some tragic reason for all this, various little incidents in their talks together having certainly pointed that way. She had too much delicacy to let her curiosity run riot, but the knowledge gave her, ironically enough, a feeling of almost protective responsibility. While she was insensible perforce to the real quality of her friend's tenderness for her, she knew, that she certainly cared for her, found her useful, less irritating than the other people who moved about her, knew in short that she would miss her when she went away. With all the impatience of her nature she detested the thought of loneliness and she began to have a familiar nightmare in which she was on the deck of a mail steamer moving out to sea while Frances stood on the wharf alone.

At this moment there is no doubt she would have stayed indefinitely at Lavender Gardens, but for the thought of her mother who still held the glorious first place on her horizon. Even in the girl's mind these two women, with half the world between them, were opposed.

The two months' grace was therefore hardly less a relief to Julien than to Frances and she advertised her good news among her friends at once. Going to the club a night or two later she told Tony about it and found him, much to her astonishment, frankly scornful at the idea that she was ever going home at all. Tony told her that such a possibility was all rot and that she need not suppose her friends in London were going to let her go and bury herself in an out of the way hole like Australia. When she asked how he would like her to call his native land an out of the way hole, he answered profoundly:

"Oh come now, it's not the same thing. England is England after all."

That was a statement it was a little hard to contradict, but in any case Julien reflected with faint amusement Tony's opinions of her country were of no particular consequence, so she let the subject drop and proceeded to tell him that she had had no success with Mrs. Cowle on behalf of the club.

But here too it seemed Tony was blandly unbelieving. Of course Mrs. Cowle would come round with a little coaxing, he pointed out. She was bound to do it for Julien's sake, and there was no particular hurry about fixing dates as long as the fact was settled.

"Simply mustn't let her refuse," he told Julien with cheerful confidence. "If at first you don't succeed you know. Tell her you won't take no for an answer Julien, that's the way to get on in this world."

This advice was delivered in such a kindly tone that Julien did not like to suggest that her own welfare was hardly concerned in the matter one way or the other. She did however protest.

"I'm sure it's quite useless, Tony."

"Useless? not a bit of it. Why, it's a jolly good advertisement for Mrs. Cowle, and sweet are the uses of advertisement as the poet says," declared Tony jovially, "and then there's the philanthropic side of it. Just talk to her a bit about my poor dear girls and you'll find she will come round all right."

"Tony," said Julien, "I wish you'd tell me how it is possibly going to help your poor dear girls as you call them? How does any of it help them? What do you imagine they get out of it."

"I say you *are* a rum sort," Tony laughed at her in good tempered amusement. "Do you mean to say the classes aren't a big thing for 'em, poor darlings, and that's the root of the whole thing. Education with a capital E D U, etc. Any other conundrums you would like to ask, kind lady?"

"No thank you?" said Julien faintly. The glibness of his quite ridiculous explanation rendered her almost inarticulate, but the marvellous part of it was that he himself seemed quite convinced by it and expected her to be so too. He was like a child who shuts his eyes and instantly imagines he is invisible to everybody else.

IV

Julien did not tell Frances of this conversation or make any effort to change her decision on Tony's behalf, knowing it would be futile. But on the way to Notting Hill the next week he did not mention the subject, and she hoped he had decided to let it drop. She was all the more astounded at the discovery she made on arriving at the club.

Tony had been seized and carried off by Hodges, and Julien stopped in the vestibule for a moment idly reading the notices posted there. These chiefly referred to class fixtures and other club matters, but there was also a by-election poster and another headed

THE A.W.S. WINTER CAMPAIGN

in flaring red letters. Julien glancing at this caught sight of a familiar name, and hardly able to believe her eyes, crossed the vestibule to examine it more closely. She read:

"The Committee has secured the services of the following eminent speakers, who will address the members of the A.W.S. as under in connection with our third great winter campaign:—

HENRY BARR, M.P., 'The Crime of Toryism,' Feb. 3rd, 8 p.m.

GEORGE BLACKVILLE, D.Sc., 'Science and the People,' Feb. 17th, 8 p.m.

R. D. MOORE, Esq., 'Socialism v. Feudalism,' March 1st, 8 p.m.
(Editor of "The Socialist")
ALBERT CROSS, Esq., 'The Worker Abroad,' March
(Johannesburg Firemen's Union).
MRS. FRANCES COWLE, 'The Progress of Woman,' Date to be
(The eminent authoress). arranged.
COUNCILLOR ATKINSON, 'Rich and Poor Laws,' March 15th, 8 p.m.
(Stepney).
MISS ANNIE SAVAGE, 'Our Prison System,' April 6th, 8 p.m.
Other dates to be arranged later.

A. CROZIER, *Secretary.*"

Julien stared at this precious announcement with cheeks grown scarlet and eyes suspiciously bright. So Tony had taken the matter into his own hands, coolly assuming that Mrs. Cowle would change her mind at his dictation. Possibly even this was a way of forcing her to do so, or at least putting the responsibility upon Julien so that she would feel bound to bring it about?

The girl was furious and she rushed indignantly upstairs in search of Tony to have the matter out with him at once. But Tony was nowhere to be seen and Reg, when consulted, explained that there was a committee meeting and he would not be out for an hour at least.

"I hope there's nothing wrong, Miss Archer," said Reg with evident concern. "If it's anything serious I might manage to get a word with him though the committee doesn't care to be disturbed as a general thing."

"Oh, I can wait," said Julien, "but I'd like to tell your committee what I think of it—making use of Mrs. Cowle's name. I have been reading that list of speakers you have posted downstairs, and I'm very indignant about it."

"Mrs. Frances Cowle?—that's the authoress, isn't it?" said Reg. "I wonder Mr. Crozier didn't tell you about that. He has persuaded her to speak for us though she doesn't usually speak in public, almost her maiden speech as you may say, Mr. Crozier thinks it will be. He's certainly a rare one for getting round the ladies, isn't he?"

Julien stared at him in helpless astonishment.

"Did he tell you that he had persuaded her?" she

said. "Did he actually say she was going to speak, because he must be mad. She isn't, she refused quite definitely. Why, I—I heard her myself."

"You take my word for it, Miss Archer, he's got over her since, Mr. Crozier has. He's like that, what you might call persistent, when he sets his mind upon a thing, but don't you worry. It comes to him easy—all in the day's work as they say, and he thinks no more about it than flying. It's just his little way."

Julien did not know in the least what this attempted consolation meant, and her whole view of Tony was becoming so demoralised that she said on an inspiration:

"Reg, are you a Socialist?"

"Oh well, I wouldn't go as far as to say that," said Reg, but there was no time for more than that, for the girls had begun to arrive.

Julien conducted the class that night with stormy eyes, and a mind that kept to the subject in hand only with a violent effort; when it was over she dismissed the girls almost hurriedly, but Rose Burton lingered behind.

"You're dead tired, that's what you are," she said in a tone of reproof.

"Not a bit," said Julien, but she smiled at the other girl, adding impulsively, "Rose I'm in a raging temper."

"You?" said Rose with deep scorn, "you wouldn't know how. What have they been doing to you any way? Just you let me know and I'll give them something sudden."

Julien laughed.

"I'm so furious I think it would be more of a consolation to do that myself," she said, "but I should be awfully obliged if you'd find Mr. Crozier for me and ask him to come here."

"Oh, it's him, is it?" said Rose darkly. "Right you are, I'll send him along to you." And she departed with gusto.

Presently she put her head in the door again.

"He's coming," she said. "Mind you pitch into him hot. If it was anybody but you I'd listen at the door."

She had hardly gone before Tony himself appeared, swinging along the corridor and whistling cheerfully.

"Hullo, Julien old girl, want me?" he said, sitting on the table and hugging his knees.

"Yes," said Julien briefly. She crossed over and shut the door, then turned to face him with her back against it.

"I want to know what you mean by that poster downstairs," she said, "and by daring to use Mrs. Cowle's name like that without permission, especially when I had told you quite definitely she would *not* speak? You've done an absolutely unpardonable thing, and I'm furiously indignant about it."

"Oh don't say that, Julien," exclaimed Tony, in a tone of injured astonishment. "Lord, what rum things girls are. I never supposed you'd take it like that, and, of course, I knew it was a sure thing you'd bring Mrs. Cowle round pretty soon. You see those posters had to be got out."

"You didn't know anything of the kind. How could you? And you didn't care. You've just exploited Mrs. Cowle for your own purposes, and exploited my friendship for her too. You know perfectly well Mrs. Cowle refused to speak, and even if you did imagine I should bring her round you had no earthly right to use her name until you were sure. Aren't we on the telephone? Couldn't you have taken the trouble to ask? Of course you couldn't because you didn't want to know."

"Oh come, I say, that's a bit strong. I give you my word I never thought of the beastly telephone. And after all no harm is done, Julien, I thought it was worth risking anyway. If Mrs. Cowle really doesn't care to speak we'll leave it at that."

Tony's air was that of one making a handsome concession, and it so enraged Julien that she stamped her foot.

"Oh I have no patience with you," she exclaimed. "You don't seem to have the slightest conception of what you've done, and may I ask if you're going to have

the posters placarded all over London? What in the world Mrs. Cowle will say about it I don't know."

"But why should she say anything at all? Why should she know?" protested Tony, in his most reasonable tone. "Of course they're not going to be posted over London, my dear girl. There are only a few out round this neighbourhood and she'll never see them. What the eye doesn't see you know— Come, Julien, don't pitch into a chap. There's no great harm done after all."

Julien said coldly: "Those posters must be recalled at once."

"That's quite impossible!"

The girl's angry eyes met the man's, astounded, sullen and a little defiant, and all at once, though she knew her own strength and the strength of her cause, she experienced as the girl Elizabeth had so often done long ago, the utter futility of this argument. She might have been banging her head against a stone wall.

She said sharply:

"It will have to be made possible. You can have new ones printed and send the bill to me."

"Oh rot, it's not a matter of expense," said Tony patiently. "Look here, Julien, isn't this rather a storm in a tea cup? Hang Mrs. Cowle! You and I are far too fond of each other to have a row about her or anybody else, now aren't we? Own up."

Julien with scarlet cheeks answered furiously:

"I don't know what you mean."

"'Course you do. You know quite well you're fond of me, you little spit-fire."

"Are you suggesting," said Miss Archer in an ominous tone, "that I am in *love* with you?"

"Oh I'm not such a vain ass as to expect a girl to admit that," said Tony. "But if you hadn't been fond of me you'd never have come down here with me week after week and bothered your little head about the club. Think I don't know that? No girl would."

"Oh," said Julien, "wouldn't she? So that's what you thought?"

She left the door, walked across the room and without glancing at him, put on her hat and coat. Then she turned upon him like a young tornado.

"The reason I came to the club," she said, her words almost tumbling over each other, "was that you hoodwinked me as you hoodwinked yourself into the belief that it was a kind of slum settlement, a charity to help poor girls. Of course it was nothing of the kind, but you in your self-complacence didn't suppose I'd find it out. I did and I continued coming simply because I found I was helping one girl at least. Now you know. As for your delicate suggestion that I'm fond of you, I'm thankful I haven't that misfortune, for that is the worst of all. You thought I cared for you, and thinking that, you used me, and through me the one person I do care for in your hateful country, for your own petty self-advancement. Now I'm going home . . . good evening!"

She flung the door open and rushed downstairs, but in a moment Tony was after her.

"Wait a minute, Julien," he called catching up with her outside, "you can't go home alone you know, you old silly."

"Yes I can," said Julien coldly, "I prefer it. Kindly let me pass." Then as a figure moved out of the gloom in front of her, she exclaimed eagerly: "Oh Rose, is that you?"

"What about me as an escort?" said Rose promptly, and Tony discomfited, saw the two melt away into the darkness together like two shadows.

"Well I'm damned," he said. "Of all the confounded tempers!"

V

Frances had been hard at work in the library all the evening. She had a little table near the fire and sometimes sat in the high-backed settle, sometimes wandered round the room looking about her with absent eyes or peering through the curtained windows at the gardens she could not see. She was very fond of this room because a great many of the things in it never ceased to bring her a thrill from far-off lovely places she had

seen. There was a little picture of blue water that always took her back to cool green Killiney Hill looking over Dublin Bay. There was a small clock whose curious ringing chime spoke of Brittany and an "old" enamel snuff box sold her by a brigand in Florence on her very first visit there how many ages ago? It was not genuine of course, but how could she cast it into outer darkness when she remembered that golden day and the feeling of rapturous extravagance that had accompanied the purchase. So on every side little odds and ends spoke to her with friendly voices, and in her solitude it was as though the whole splendid pageant of life was passing under her eyes.

To-night the spell of these things had made her mind extraordinarily keen and she had worked with new vigour. The delight, almost the excitement of that absorbed her whole attention, and merely personal pleasures and dismays did not seem to matter any more.

It was very still on this side of the house for there was no wind, and the trees outside stood steady and black against the sky, where frosted stars looked down on London. Into this hushed quiet the clamour of the hall door bell suddenly intruded, followed soon by swift footsteps and the opening of the library door. Frances thinking it was too early by half an hour to expect Julien, and reluctant to be disturbed by visitors to-night, looked up impatiently and then she saw the girl herself come in quickly and with a young fury, the whole atmosphere electric round her.

The sight of her face as she came in almost visibly breaking the peace of the quiet room, brought Frances to her feet, her heart thumping like a hammer. She looked so extraordinarily upset, so wild indeed, that Frances had an instant suspicion that she was found out, and instinctively she was on the defensive although all these years she had assured herself there was nothing to defend. And then all thought of herself was swallowed up in the realisation of how it might be going to hurt or trouble Julien, how perhaps it had already done so, and she was half across the room to her, had her in her arms.

"My darling," she said, for she had forgotten the other woman now. She and Julien were the only people in the world.

And the girl clung to her, put her head down on her shoulder, bursting into tears.

"I'll never go near the hateful club again," she said.

In the swift relief the words brought her, Frances had a curious sensation of being someone else and now as she looked round the room the things in it no longer spoke to her but stood out inanimate and cold, for Julien was troubled and needed her, and the overwhelming splendour of that knowledge left room for no other emotion or thought. Nothing in the girl's triumphant, eager, confident youth had been able to rouse the other woman to so passionate a tenderness as this sudden weakness and dependence on her. Her own dismays forgotten, she held her close, stroking her hair with hands no longer awkward or unpractised. And then as Julien, recovering a little told her story, she knew relief of another kind, for hadn't she been in her secret fears tremendously right about Tony, and didn't this put him securely beyond the pale as far as Julien was concerned? In the face of that the matter of the poster troubled her not at all. She laughed away the girl's distress at it, deciding to let him have his satisfaction if he wanted it and much good might it do him.

"He called you an *eminent authoress*," said Julien indignantly.

"Let him," said Mrs. Cowle. "I have even been called a lady novelist before this on the same principle that one talks of a gentleman farmer I suppose."

And the girl laughed, exclaiming:

"It's heavenly of you to be so nice about it, but I can't. I'm furious with Tony."

Frances knew nothing of the gradual disillusionment Julien had suffered with regard to Tony's self-sacrificing qualities, but presently that came out too, the girl exclaiming: "And I simply wouldn't let myself believe it. That's about the fact of the matter. Oh I could shake myself. I suppose I was determined to like Tony from the beginning because Penelope was so

down upon him and he really can be entertaining when he chooses. But I'm certain I never gave him the slightest reason to suppose I liked him better than any other man I know. Do you think I did ? "

The tone was anxious, so much had the whole affair shattered her confidence in herself, and Frances assured her smiling :

" Of course not, my dearest, but you're so full of enthusiasms and that is a thing the Tony's of this world don't understand or approve in a woman unless it is connected with their own charms. I daresay he would tell you he thinks woman should be the complement of man but in his own mind he spells it with an ' i.' "

" He spells most things with an ' I ',' said Julien gloomily. " You never really liked him, did you, and yet you saw far less of him than I. I can't think how you knew."

Frances smiled. She herself had no doubts on that subject for it seemed to her that she must always know by instinct the forces and dangers that were about the girl's life. And at that moment all the queer false standards, the little embarrassments that hedge our speech dropped from her and she said :

" It is because I care for you more than anyone in the world."

And after all in her own ears it sounded a simple statement and she wondered that such things should be hard to say.

Julien, not quite so well able to breast that wave of emotion, said in a hushed voice :

" I think I—knew but I don't know why."

" Of course you don't," said Frances, and had an almost overpowering desire to tell her why, to tell her quickly before her so carefully fostered prudence should prevent. And then something interrupted. It was the chiming of the little clock, and the familiar sound steadied her nerves, brought her back immediately to the danger of that, so that she only said, with a note of defiance in her voice :

" Some day perhaps I'll tell you, Julien."

CHAPTER XX

THE ROAD TO—ARCADY

"Isn't there the light of seven heavens in your heart alone, the way you'll be an angel's lamp to me from this out, and I abroad in the darkness."

J. M. Synge.

I

FOR the remainder of that week Frances kept Julien hard at work so that she should have very little time to think of Tony and his shortcomings, still none too sure that she had not liked him rather more than she was willing to admit. For the same reason she began to plan a little excursion which, the more she thought of it, seemed filled with possibilities of delight. As soon as the book was finished, a matter of days now, she would take the girl to Paris, and they would have a few weeks there together, something they could both remember, something that would be worth remembering.

She did not tell Julien until it was all arranged, for the girl was not to be allowed to suspect that the trip was primarily on her behalf.

"I want a change now the book is finished," Frances said, "and since there isn't the club to keep you in London I can have you with me. I've decided that we'll cross on Wednesday."

Julien in the midst of her delight at this news was inclined to be doubtful about the club for she could not help seeing that her desertion of it was rather giving colour to Tony's suspicions than otherwise. There was also Rose Burton to be considered, and she at least must not be selfishly abandoned in spite of all the Tonys in the universe. Frances had to admit that she was right in this, and it was eventually decided that a substitute should be sent to the club in her absence and

that afterwards the car should take her there and call for her, so that she could dispense with Tony's escort.

Julien would have liked to send word to this effect to Reg, ignoring Tony altogether, but was eventually persuaded that an attitude of cool dignity became her more. Therefore in due time Mr. Crozier received the following note:

"Dear Tony,—As I shall be out of England for a short time I am sending a substitute for the present to take my class. I shall probably be able to continue it on my return for the remainder of my stay in London, but do not wish you to feel any further responsibility about my safe conduct to and from the club, as Mrs. Cowle has made other arrangements.

Yours sincerely,
JULIEN ARCHER."

Tony, reading this, said to himself with triumph:

"Aha! my lady, coming round, are you? Leave 'em 'alone and they'll come home, that's the ticket."

II

So Paris received them, the same pale gold, bewitching city of dreams that had greeted McMorris a week or two ago. Beside it the memory of London, grey and mysterious in her winter veils, retreated like a ghost, for Paris, coquette of the cities that she is, has this way of luring us for a moment from our greater loves.

Frances and Julien gave themselves up to her old enchantment like a pair of children. Julien it appeared had even a guide-book in her possession and read it up brazenly at night since Frances firmly refused to be seen in public with it. Apart from that concession to her feelings she agreed to be as assiduous as any tourist, living over rather wistfully in the girl's excited pleasure her own long ago dreams of a Paris she had never expected to see. In many ways these excursions with Julien at the heels of voluble guides and conducted parties, with the wonderful variety of millinery and accent involved, were a new experience to her. Certainly their mutual joy in every little incident, their

laughing, secret glances and the long confidential talks together made it an enthralling one. Here, away from the world that knew them, they had grown very near each other, intuitively free from the reserves that hitherto perforce had qualified their intercourse. Frances threw her doubts behind her and gave herself to the girl and to a happiness such as she had never in her wildest dreams expected to know again.

Between excursions they haunted the shops, Julien bent on seeking presents for a long list of friends at home, Frances also recklessly spending. She found a new delight in buying Julien every earthly thing she chose to admire, all the little intimate things a mother buys her daughter, and when the girl protested in embarrassment, she continued these purchases by stealth to be given to her later on. She was passionately glad that she was well enough off nowadays to deny herself no pleasure of this kind and to be able to make these days, surely given her by a relenting fate, an unforgettable experience to Julien.

III

And then to interrupt their new delightful solitude appeared McMorris. It was Julien who saw him as they came out of Cook's offices in the Place de L'Opera one morning. She was a little ahead of Frances, and she and the young man stopped and shook hands with the naive astonishment and enthusiasm wont to attack even the most casual acquaintances meeting by accident on foreign soil.

"I say, this is a jolly surprise," said McMorris, and Frances appearing in time to hear his exclamation, protested:

"Don't qualify that very rash statement this time, will you, Mr. McMorris."

"Rather not," said McMorris, and had the grace to grin his appreciation, "but I had no idea you and Miss Archer were in Paris, Mrs. Cowle."

" Hush !—we are not—officially," said Frances, with a humorous glance for their place of meeting. " I'm not even sure we ought to recognise superior and cynical Londoners like you. The fact is Julien is improving my education with the aid of a guide book and the invaluable Mr. Thomas Cook. It is really appalling to find how much I don't know about Paris."

" I suppose you haven't room for another pupil ? " he gravely suggested to Julien, " or we might exchange instruction—*au pair*—isn't that the correct expression ? Do you think you could bear two of us, Mrs. Cowle ? "

And Frances, faintly malicious, exclaimed :

" But I thought you had been instructing me for quite a long time now, Mr. McMorris."

" I suppose I must retire crushed," he offered sadly, and then she laughed.

" Please don't. Come back with us to luncheon instead if you haven't anything better to do."

Obviously he had not, so they went off together through the sunny streets, Julien gaily enumerating their adventures to date, Frances watching the two young people, and a little reluctant at the intrusion of McMorris, yet glad of his sudden capitulation after all.

The fact was that she saw the young man in a somewhat chastened spirit, the result of the little affair with Ida on a temperament that had its rigid qualities of personal conduct however deftly these might be hidden or denied, and now he was rather uncomfortably aware that his reception or rather rejection of Mrs. Cowle's advances had not only been presumptuous but slightly absurd. It was more than decent of her, all things considered, to overlook that so completely.

It was inevitable that McMorris should have been a little spoiled by those unfortunate girls of his circle, still yearly entered in the unequal contest for a husband, but here again the affair with Ida had its uses for it made him distrustful of his attitude to her difficult sex altogether. He was afraid that perhaps he had been guilty of a horrible self-complacence.

In this frame of mind Julien Archer was the one girl

of his acquaintance he could have met without irritation and even secret embarrassment. They at least had been good friends with no suspicion of anything else. Julien's utter unconsciousness had made that delightfully possible. He had not forgotten the little incident coming home from Silver Ridges but Julien he knew had seen no significance in that, and now he was glad of it and greeted her with relief.

It is quite likely that Julien also, straight from her experience with Tony, found reassurance in McMorris's friendly presence. Frances, listening to their eager talk all luncheon, saw that they were frankly glad to be together. She had a sudden conviction that Fate whom she had so unwisely recognised—always a dangerous proceeding—had now turned the tables on her, and she would no longer have the girl entirely to herself during this visit; but for once she did not struggle against that because there were certain elements of consolation in it. Wasn't it just gloriously possible that something might come of it, that the two young people might care for each other, and in any case wasn't she fulfilling the natural province of a girl's mother in watching over her for such affairs? She knew a continual, wistful anxiety to do that, to take, however little Julien might realise it, the place she had left in her life all those years ago.

They went that afternoon, at McMorris's suggestion, for a long drive in the Bois. The day was fine with little clouds racing over a blue sky, and the air full of the pleasant sound of hoof-beats on far-off echoing roadways and the low whirr of motors rushing by. All the world of Paris seemed to be driving along the trim tree-bordered road towards the Bois, where the houses stood in lofty elegance behind their portes-cochères, or more modest or friendly, smiled above green hedges. And the people who went by were trim and smiling too, these small, pale, clear-complexioned people of France. Here and there McMorris was able to identify some notability to whose history Frances had nearly always a word or two of hearsay or personal knowledge

to add, offering no comment the young man noticed but speaking with the aloof authority of a woman who has more than a passing acquaintance with foreign cities, but is yet an onlooker there. Julien, her cheeks flushed, watched and listened with delight.

"Oh, this is better than the Louvre," she exclaimed. "Julien, you're a hopeless vandal."

But McMorris was aware of a sudden that he did not think so. His thoughts had gone back to the night not many weeks ago when he had stood on Westminster Bridge and watched the people going by. That fugitive incident had had a quite definite effect upon him and now the girl's absorbing interest in life was like a torch to it, by the light of which, he was sensible of the artificiality of his old standards.

Julien, not in the least upset by the accusation, agreed.

"I suppose I must be, but I can't help thinking there ought to be a law against any gallery that holds more than twenty pictures. Then one might have a chance to grow really fond of them. I went through miles of them in Italy last year, and whenever I think of it, I see hundreds of rather stout angels and ladies with gold soup plates behind their heads who generally seem to be sitting on the roof. Why did the artists of the middle ages think it a saintly proceeding to sit on the roof in a pink dressing-gown I wonder? And such slanting roofs too. It must have been dreadfully uncomfortable for the poor dears."

"I have a shrewd suspicion," said McMorris, "that you are describing one of my favourite pictures in the National Gallery."

"I shouldn't wonder. What did I tell you? I've now seen most of the famous pictures of London, Paris and Rome and don't know one from the other."

"Never mind, dear," said Frances "you will be able to go home and pose as an authority on art."

McMorris wanted to protest that Julien couldn't pose if she tried, but resisted the impulse because he saw in advance Mrs. Cowle's mirthful reception of such

a statement. It was a delicate subject between them.

Yet the fact was there clearly before him just the same. If the girl's presence in Paris did not immediately banish the doubts and difficulties of the last few weeks, it did at least cheer him considerably and make clearer his aspirations and outlook. She was such a thoroughly good comrade he decided.

IV

Julien lived up to her reputation during the next week or two, for inevitably they saw a good deal of the young man. He had been working hard at his play since his arrival in Paris and was now rewriting the first act before sending it on its travels, and he seemed to find in the girl's society both rest and inspiration. Frances, who might have hindered that, proved an indulgent chaperone and more than that a wise one for she never had the air of being a chaperone at all. On more than one occasion she made some perfectly legitimate excuse for staying indoors and left the two young people to themselves. They wandered about, exploring the parks and boulevards or going by tram into the outlying suburbs and talking busily all the way. And Paris was kind to them, the days slipping by, clear and full of a delicate winter sunlight with hardly a hint of rain.

Julien heard more of the play during these excursions, its progress and ultimate aim, and her interest became a spur which often, it has to be admitted, kept the young man working half the night. She argued some of the situations with him, bringing to the exercise a clear mind unprejudiced and free from the literary taint. Very soon, she knew all the difficulties confronting the embryo playwright and with her inveterate taste for interference was eager to help him to overcome them. She thought about this a great deal in private, and was almost certain she saw one way of doing so, but for once was a little diffident about it, not sure

how McMorris would receive her efforts. Then one day she found herself throwing these doubts behind her and confiding the matter to Frances, always her final court of appeal.

They were resting together in the elder woman's room after a strenuous day of sight-seeing at Fontainebleau. McMorris had not accompanied them, and Frances, glad of the long day together, wistfully anxious to know that the girl also had enjoyed it, said :—

" I'm afraid you missed your cavalier to-day."

" I do like that," said Julien twinkling, " he isn't mine any more than yours. As if anyone would look at me when you were there."

Then seating herself on her friend's bed she added :—

" You like him, don't you, dearest ? "

" Very much," said Frances giving her a quick glance.

" And I know you think he's clever," continued Julien eagerly. " Oh, I simply must tell you. He's written a play."

" You don't say so ? "

The girl met the tender quizzical eyes and laughed.

" It sounds great, it does really," she said. " He has been telling me about it. He expected to finish it to-day but there seem to be all sorts of difficulties to get over before he will have any definite news of it. For one thing he says Herrick is the only man to put it on, but he takes ages to read a play and then you never can be sure that he has, particularly if you are only a beginner. Isn't it a shame that people should be so careless ? "

There is that difficulty of course," agreed Frances, amused at the girl's new tone of instruction. " Herrick is rather a leisurely soul I know."

" Did he produce some of your plays ? "

" One or two."

" Oh dearest, I suppose you couldn't make him hurry up ? "

Frances smiled at her.

" How many more protégés do you mean to collect?" she said.

"I suppose you must get rather tired of them," said Julien soberly, "for I always bring them to you to be helped, don't I?"

"My darling! I'm glad you do."

Frances turned her face away for a moment, but presently continued:—

"What is it you want me to do for the latest case? Write to Mr. Herrick and persuade him to read this work of genius at once? I suppose that might be done, or I could give Mr. McMorris a note to him. The only thing is, that your young friend might resent such interference on my part. I think, my dear little girl, you would have to sound him very carefully for his views on the subject first."

I will, the very next time I have a chance," said Julien, "but surely he couldn't resent it. Why should he?"

Privately, she was doubtful herself and she asked the question with some anxiety.

"Some men," explained Frances drily, "will never admit that a woman could be of any use."

"No," said Julien vigorously, thinking of Tony, "and some think a woman is to be made use of all the time. I don't know which is the worse."

V

The subject worried Julien all night and made her unusually wakeful. Now that she had taken the plunge with regard to McMorris's play she was inclined for almost the first time in her life to be alarmed by her own temerity. Supposing he did, like some men, despise feminine assistance and laugh at the help Mrs. Cowle could give him? The very idea seemed to the girl so ungenerous, so small-minded and ungrateful that it made her indignant to think of it. She realised too, that if he did turn out to be like that, he would disappoint her more than anyone she had ever known, from which it will be seen that Miss Archer had reached

a milestone on the road to matrimony. She had come from believing that all men were jolly good fellows to hoping that one man was perfection personified.

He called next morning to see if they had any excursions on foot, and found Frances, very cleverly, immersed in correspondence.

"I shall be busy all the morning," she said, "so you young people must go without me this time."

Julien all at once reluctant, hung back.

"I ought to be writing the letters and letting you go out," she said. "What is a secretary for I should like to know?"

"To do what she is told. Please take her away and leave me in peace, Mr. McMorris."

That settled it, but Julien seemed nervous and depressed, and was so quiet that McMorris presently exclaimed:—

"I say, I believe you're tired. What a selfish rotter I am. Perhaps you didn't want to come out."

"Yes I did," Julien assured him, recovering a little, "but I'm half asleep this morning. I want a quick walk to wake me up."

So they walked on at random, presently taking the road towards Neuilly, because the river beckoned, and stopping at last at a little pavement café for refreshments.

There were few customers at this hour and Jean, the stout waiter, whom *Madame la proprietaire* treated to a shrill monotone at intervals, gave them his best attention. There were certainly more sous to be made out of the *jeunes anglais* than the seasoned tourists at the next table, or the stern old *marchande* in the corner.

"Deux cafés? but yes, Monsieur," said Jean, achieving this exploit into the visitors' language with a proud smile. And Julien complained as he went away:—

"They all do that, and I call it most unfair. I've been trying to practise my best French ever since I reached Paris and the natives listen politely and answer

me, in English. Can you imagine anything more crushing ? "

" We'll dare the old ruffian to speak anything but his own language," said McMorris fiercely, " what is he here for I should like to know ? "

He was in high spirits this morning, for the play was actually finished and he felt, he said, like a little boy out of school. When Jean returned with the coffee he poured out such a flood of English upon him that the unfortunate waiter retired worsted from the fray.

" And now there's Herrick to be thought of," the young man told Julien with a sigh, returning to the subject of the play, " and probably twelve months' wait before the old beggar condescends to look at it."

" Couldn't anyone speak to him for you ? " said Julien desperately taking her courage in her hands.

" I wish I knew, but anyway it's rather difficult. I can't inflict that sort of job on my friends, even if I could think of anyone likely to have any weight there."

Julien hesitated, then flushing nervously enquired:—

" Mr. McMorris, would you let Mrs. Cowle speak to him ? "

The young man gave a low whistle.

" Would she ? " he said eagerly." Oh, but you know I'm afraid she'd think I had unmitigated cheek to suggest it."

" You wouldn't have to," Julien assured him excitedly, " because I have already, and she'll do it in a moment. Oh, I'm glad you don't mind. I told her all about the play last night."

" Mine ? "

He looked at her in amazement and delight and all at once he felt his blood stirring. Julien's cheeks were flushed, her grey eyes brilliant. She looked so adorable, that he wanted to take her in his arms in spite of the tourists and Jean and the sour-looking *marchande*. He thought with a sudden flash of enlightenment of the race through the moonlight, that Christmas night at Fields, and the dreary unsatis-

fying days directly afterwards, and he said to himself:—"What an unutterable ass I am."

"I think you're the most marvellous girl I've ever known," he told Julien fervently "and a perfect little Briton to go calmly off and pull strings for a chap like that. I say, you know, I think we'd better go into partnership, Miss Capulet. Please be my business manager."

They laughed at the old name, Julien turning her eyes away rather quickly, because in her relief and pleasure they were absurdly full of tears. She looked up the smooth little road towards Neuilly and further to Paris, showing blue in the distance, and somehow that steadied her so that she was able to protest:—

"How absurd you are. Why, I haven't really done anything at all."

Yet all the same she was glad he thought she had, and that he was so frankly willing to take her help and Mrs. Cowle's, for didn't it prove that he was splendidly different from all the rest. She did not stop to ask herself why she wanted him to be that or to think exactly what she meant by it, but said eagerly:—

"Mrs. Cowle will give you a letter to Herrick, if you like, or write and tell him he is to read the play at once without wasting a single minute. Oh, I do hope it will bring you luck and that he'll jump at it. I'd like to know it was all fixed up before I go home, for I suppose it will be ages before we see it in Australia."

"But you're not going home?" expostulated McMorris in dismay. "Good lord, you can't go and desert us like that. We couldn't allow it you know. I never heard of such a rotten suggestion."

His tone was so injured that she laughed.

"But of course, I must," she nodded, "in May."

As she met his eyes, she turned her own away again quickly and her heart began to thump, while a little flame of colour crept into her cheeks. She looked at Paris in the distance, looked hard, because its spires seemed to be jumping about in a most reprehensible

manner. And then a hand closed over hers and a voice she hardly recognised said :—

" Julien, do you want to go ? "

She couldn't find her own voice. It had gone somehow, but she held tight to the friendly hand and forgot the spires of Paris. The little flame mounted to her eyes and she smiled at him divinely, shaking her head.

The next moment she was in his arms, to their lasting disgrace as members of a staid and chilly nation, but to the infinite entertainment of Jean, the tourists and *Madame la proprietaire,* the sour old *marchande* having gone by this time.

" Goodness knows how many people are looking at us," exclaimed Julien at last, awaking to the knowledge of their audience, in alarm.

" Let 'em," said McMorris with truly British scorn, " They're only a lot of Frenchies."

They looked at each other happily and laughed.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LETTER

" Yon moon that mocks me through the uncurtained glass
Recalls that other night, that other moon."
Theodore Watts Dunton.

I

FRANCES naturally found this sudden realisation of her hopes almost impossible to believe, chiefly because she had so greatly wanted it. She had supposed it a vain dream at the best and now to her excited fancy there was something almost menacing in such unlooked for good fortune.

The two young people had brought her their news with frank delight in the situation and each other, Julien confident that she would be pleased about it, McMorris anxious as though he saw in her the first representative of parental authority.

" I am the luckiest chap on earth, Mrs. Cowle," he told her, for these occasions make for triteness.

" I almost think you are," said Frances, " and I am glad for purely selfish reasons, because I hope it means I am not going to lose the little girl so completely after all.

Beneath her words and the unusual warmth of the little smile that went with them, the young man was all at once sensible of an appeal that touched him to an extraordinary degree. At that moment he definitely liked Mrs. Cowle and he hastened to assure her:—

" I know Julien feels that, too, and it is one reason she is glad to stay on this side of the world. It means a lot to her that she'll be near enough to see you constantly."

Frances smiled her thanks for that very boyish assurance. It was there with her triumphantly all the

afternoon when she had sent the two young people, in spite of polite protests, to spend the rest of this greatest day in the calendar together. She was full of tenderness for them, for their young new pleasure in each other's glances, for the Castles in Spain they were already furnishing. For the first time in years she let her mind go back to the days when she had dreamed with Julien's father just such dreams of devotion and high purpose. Somehow there was no bitterness in that memory to-day, and she could think of her own young lover of all those years ago kindly, even with gentleness, remembering his debonair and charming presence and her tremendous pride in him.

She had been at that time younger than Julien, very much younger in her experience of the world. Brought up by a book-loving but very little else loving father in an up-country township of New South Wales, she had spent a repressed and rather solitary childhood, ending in a few years at a boarding-school in Sydney after her father's death. Both her parents had been English, but she could not remember her mother, and there were no near relatives that she had ever heard of. Often since she had found the elements of a mystery in this, had wondered whether there had not been somewhere in it the seeds of her own rebellion later on, but if so it was a mystery without a key. There was no one to solve it for her. Her father had left her a little money, just over £1,000, his executor being one of his few intimate friends, the owner of a sheep station in their neighbourhood. It was at this man's Sydney house that the girl, her school-days just over, had met William Archer, the young lawyer and politician from Adelaide. What this glorious personage had seen in the shy, dark-eyed girl it would be hard to say unless it was the ardour of her admiration for him and all he represented. The girl's mind, just awakening, was full of an intense, almost passionate eagerness for life and all the things that had been sternly negatived by her father. She had, moreover, an innate sense of personal power, and when young Archer, captivated, flattered perhaps by the hero-

worship he read in the sensitive clever face, asked her to marry him, it was as though the whole great smiling world opened its arms to her.

There was irony now in the remembrance of her secret tremors lest she should not be able adequately to help that wonderful career. Her engagement had been partly a time of great emotional excitement, partly a still and spiritual probation for marriage, that great initiation that was to prove so black and bitter a disillusion after all. Even now she could not safely consider that and she smiled a little scornfully to think how utterly unprepared she had been, how confident, not of herself, but of the man into whose hands she had given her happiness and life.

Just so Julian was confident to-day, wasn't it the foolish, inevitable fashion of lovers? But after all Julien had more reason—different reasons at all events. She belonged to the new order, and just as her mother's confidence had been due to a harshly enforced ignorance, so her own was born of knowledge, to which she had been invisibly guided all her life.

The certainty of that made Frances think of the other woman whose pictured face, serene and kind, had smiled at her so disconcertingly whenever she entered Julien's room in Lavender Gardens. That was the force, hadn't the girl's conversation shown it a dozen times?—that had been with her always, indulgent, watchful, yet restraining too in its quiet humour, its amused outlook on a strenuous world.

Julien's childhood at least had never been repressed or solitary, and as once before, Frances was suddenly grateful to the other woman. Ah! she could afford to be that now, for wasn't this her hour of triumph, since she was to keep Julien after all? Didn't it amount to that with all these thousands of miles between the girl and her old associations? And Julien was glad to stay? There was the illuminating fact before her. It was perhaps natural that she would not allow herself to realise how much the girl might be torn both ways.

II

They dined with McMorris that night to celebrate the great occasion, and presently passed to the serious discussion of the date of the wedding, which McMorris wanted immediately, of course, and of Julien's parents and how, all that distance away, he was to placate them. It was reassuring to find that Julien herself had no doubts on that subject. It was not only that she was of age. That aspect of it did not appear to come into her calculations at all, but the very thought of interference from her people in any matter that so nearly touched her, was beyond her comprehension from her knowledge of them. She said her mother would like George at once, and where she led, her father would soon very charmingly follow. She had already warned him they would have to take the journey to Australia very often for she could not give up her own country, and if, in between, the mountain would not come to Mahomet, at least her mother would, and that was the great thing after all.

The discussion of the time and place of the wedding was a little difficult for Julien's natural desire had been to go home in May as she had intended, while George should follow to claim her later on. George, however, eagerly tried to talk her out of that all the evening. If as they hoped anything came of the play and Mrs. Cowle's intervention with Herrick, it might, he pointed out, be almost impossible for him to go so long a journey at any given date ahead, whereas, if they were married in London during the next few months they would be able, both being on the spot (and however Herrick's verdict went) to make a definite date for a long and glorious honeymoon trip to Australia. The fate of the play was George's most powerful argument, his need of her in that connection the one appeal that Julien was likely to be quite unable to resist. He wanted her, her help in a hundred little details if things went well, and no less her presence to console and urge him on to further efforts if they did not. Such was the gist of his urging,

and Julien loved this, his first claim upon her, and was eagerly anxious not to fail him.

Frances naturally applauded this suggestion for she passionately wanted the wedding to be her affair. Since the kindly fates had given so much surely they would grant her a little thing like that, and she pointed out to Julien that putting sentiment aside George's plan was merely common sense, since it would be far better for her to go out in his care than with any casual acquaintance who happened to be going.

" I'm sure your—people would agree if you suggested that, my dear little girl," she said.

Julien smiled at her and for some reason there was an excited colour in her cheeks.

" Oh I'd like to be married in London," she admitted, " but I must let them decide, I must really."

It was her last word on the subject and after all a fair enough condition they had to admit. But as she said good night to George later, Frances having tactfully effaced herself, she did concede a little more.

" I'll ask them to cable," she said, " I'm nearly sure they'll give in to us about the wedding, as sure as I can be, because mother is certain to understand when I tell her of the play, but you see I want her to be there—I want it dreadfully."

" You darling," said McMorris to whom that little confidence kept for his ears alone took on the aspect of something divine. " I'm a selfish brute even to think of the beastly play, and, of course we'll have the wedding in Australia. You're giving up too much for me already, your people and your home. I'm hanged if I know how I had the cheek to suggest it."

Julien lifting up her head and laughing said :

" Oh ! I'm so glad you did."

Then she added :

" But we'll leave the wedding for them to decide because it's just possible mother will find a way out of the difficulty. Oh George dear, don't you see ! She may come over for it. I'm not going to say anything. I'm not even going to hope."

" I am," said McMorris.

III

Frances wonderfully happy and at peace, sat by the fire in her own room. Every now and then she could hear their voices, low and quiet and softly laughing; more often she could hear nothing at all, and then she smiled into the fire, her own eyes dim. Curiously enough she was not in the least jealous of McMorris, rather she rejoiced with him for hadn't the match been of her conceiving, and wasn't that in its way prophetic and wonderful enough? The kindness she had always felt for him had suddenly become something nearer and she was glad that these weeks in Paris had so completely swept his former hostility to her away.

And then Julien came in to put a pair of warm young arms around her neck in a good-night hug, a bright eyed but suddenly elusive Julien, who very soon had gone off to bed almost without any further word between them. Frances was hurt by that, realising all at once how she had been sub-consciously looking forward to it, their first real moment together since the great event. Hadn't mothers and daughters things to say to each other at such a time? And even though the girl had no suspicion of the real relationship, shouldn't she have come instinctively?

When after half an hour or so the light was still visible under the girl's door, she decided to go to her.

Julien was in her dressing-gown busily writing, but when she heard Frances' exclamation: "Why, you little night-owl, not in bed yet!" she raised a flushed face and laughed, turning round in her chair.

"I was writing to mother. I simply couldn't wait," she said, "I did want to have a talk with her, and you see that's my only way."

(So after all the instinct had been there, but turned in the wrong direction.)

Frances coming to her, said in a queer voice:

"Wouldn't I have done to talk to? You must try to think of me as a kind of—second-hand mother for the time being."

"You're a dear," said Julien smiling at her affectionately. "Isn't it queer this should have happened in France of all places—because it was here my own mother died! It's rather nice really. I like to think she knew all these lovely things we've been seeing. It must have been horribly bad luck for her to die like that."

The girl's tone was reflective, interested but not in the least emotional. After all she was talking of someone she had never known, but to Frances there was bound to be fresh pain in that and she said after a moment, because she saw in it a kind of preparation for something she had now quite determined to tell Julien some day:

"It isn't always a bad thing to die."

"But she was such a girl, younger than I am," said Julien, "and I should be furiously disappointed if I thought I had to die to-morrow. . . . What a dreadfully doleful conversation, isn't it? Dearest, I love this frock. I'm so glad you wore it to-night."

Frances smiled.

"To-morrow we must begin to buy somebody else's frocks," she said, "I want you to let me give you your trousseau, my darling. Whichever end of the world the wedding happnes, there is that to be thought of, and Paris will be our happy hunting-ground."

"Oh, I'm sure I oughtn't to let you," exclaimed Julien, deprecating, and perhaps a little wistful as though she saw how they were conspiring to wrest from her one by one the privileges of her own people, "you've done far too much for me already."

But at the other's: "*Don't* refuse me, Julien," she saw how little any protest was likely to stand. There was something in Mrs. Cowle's voice that she had noticed once or twice before, something rather piteous that hurt her impatient youth, and as the voice continued, "You shall have everything else your own way," she exclaimed laughing, her arms round the other's waist:

"I generally do, don't I? Oh I am being dreadfully

spoiled, and of course I'd love you to give it to me, dearest."

So that was settled. Julien releasing herself presently —trying to return to normal things, gathered up the pages of her letter.

"I must finish it in the morning," she said, "though it is frightfully long already. George is writing too, to father—at this very moment I daresay. Poor old boy, I think he expected it to be rather an ordeal."

"I suppose fathers are inclined to be formidable at these times!" said Frances watching her curiously.

"Mine couldn't be if he tried, even in a letter." said Julien with a chuckle. "Dear old father's the most awfully unformidable person you could possibly meet,"

"You don't think he'll mind losing you?"

The question was eager. She was ready to be triumphant that he shouldn't mind, yet indignant for the same reason, but Julien said:

"I suppose he'll mind in a way, but after all he has the children. Dearest, you will write to mother for me won't you?"

It was evident she expected her mother to mind in spite of the children, but that appeal to spare the other woman anxiety was the one of all others that Frances would inevitably be determined to resist. She argued swiftly and a little irritably that they would not want letters from her, that there was nothing in any case she could say about George that Julien herself would not have said already, but even as she argued perhaps she had a conviction that she would have to give in, and sure enough Julien went on:

"Oh of course mother will think I'm prejudiced but if you would just send her a line and tell her you know and like him she'd feel sure it was all right. I don't see how else we shall get them to let me be married here, unless mother could come over to see for herself."

"You couldn't possibly expect her to do that," protested Frances hastily, "all that way! My dear little girl, it would be selfish to suggest it."

"Yes I suppose it would," agreed Julien. She did

not add that it wouldn't be selfish to hope however for hadn't she decided not to hope. And Frances, relieved at this admission and seeing there was a good deal in what the girl had said, promised:

"Very well, if you think it would be better I'll write to her."

IV

Yet even after she had gone to bed the necessity annoyed and worried her, not for its danger which she knew well enough to be practically nil. A fancied resemblance of handwriting to that of someone he had long known to be dead, was hardly the thing to interest, much less excite, the man she remembered. It was rather a personal reluctance to have even so vague a communication with her old life, as though at a touch it might come back and engulf her, a feeling that in doing so she yielded something to those old forces that had destroyed her youth, and that she was passionately determined never to do.

Through all this over and over in her mind as she lay in bed, the letter to the second Mrs. Archer wrote and rewrote itself a double-edged weapon, with sometimes triumph and sometimes bitterness underlying its ostensible purpose.

"Julien will still be near me. (*She is mine now, altogether mine*). George McMorris is clever but refreshingly modest about it. (*She at least shall not marry a charming fool*)."

Of course this was a preposterous state of affairs and by and by she got up and walked about the room trying with all her might to dismiss the wretched letter from her mind. She went to the window presently, pushing the curtains back and resting her cheek upon the cool glass. She had not turned on the light and a moon was riding over Paris so that she saw the city silver-roofed, and below the narrow vista of the street where like a fantastic picture badly focussed the endless procession of life went by. She opened the window a little and the faint sigh of the world came in with a

breath of frosty air that brought her all at once the individual smell of Paris, carrying her back, as it never failed to do, to her first night there many years ago. The remembrance was so vivid for a moment that she even seemed to hear the heavy breathing of the sick woman who had been her companion on that occasion. And then to follow it came the picture of the little village in the South where she had buried the other woman, and she—Elizabeth Archer—had so miraculously found her freedom. The rush of relief that memory brought her seemed to flood her whole being, even now, and she stood in the moonlight with the little wind blowing the curtains around her tall figure, holding her breath at the wonder of it and conscious that nothing that had happened since remotely mattered in comparison.

At last she put down the window and turned back into the room, switching on the light. She felt suddenly young, grateful, full of kindness, and now recalling the letter to the second Mrs. Archer, it seemed a simple matter and the least she could do for the mother—even the stepmother of a girl who had become engaged while in her care.

Impulsively she took out her writing-case and wrote:

"Dear Mrs. Archer, Julien is anxious that I should write and tell you what I can of 'the dearest boy in England!' I have not known Mr. McMorris very intimately myself, but his aunt, Mrs. Standish, who is devoted to him, is one of my oldest friends, and being a woman of great force of character, her judgment may be relied upon. To meet he is certainly delightful, clever enough to be modest, young enough to be enthusiastic and I believe throughly straight-going. It is quite evident that he is very much in love and he strikes me as being exactly suited to a girl of Julien's temperament, for he is deeply interested in the things she cares for, and is not the kind of man who would marry for relaxation.

"Perhaps this may seem a very bare recital but at least it is a sincere one. Your little girl is so dear to me that I could not lightly consider anything that touched her happiness, and when I say I know no one to whom I would more willingly trust it than George McMorris, I am paying him the highest compliment I know.

"I hope this brief note may help to relieve the anxiety which you will naturally feel at being so far from Julien at such a time and that you will believe I shall give her the care and affection of her own mother. If you decide to allow the young people to be married before they sail for Australia, the ceremony will of course take place from my house, which I assure you will be a very lonely one when Julien has gone away.

Yours sincerely,

FRANCES COWLE."

Frances smiled a little as she read this through but now quite without bitterness. She was sorry for the second Mrs. Archer, who, after all was losing Julien, and for that reason the letter was far more cordial than she would otherwise have made it. A little distrustful of her own mood she quickly addressed, sealed and stamped it for the morning post, then hurried into bed.

Next day the letter was on its way, a month later to be carried about and read and re-read many times, becoming at last a determining factor in the one course Frances passionately hoped the second Mrs. Archer would not pursue.

CHAPTER XXII

BREAKING IT GENTLY

" For he's going to marry Yum Yum, Yum Yum,
Your anger pray bury,
You all should be merry
And join our expressions of glee."

W. S. Gilbert.

I

A FORTNIGHT later they returned to London. The engagement was not to be announced until Julien heard from her people, which really meant of course that everyone in the least interested was told at once, while the general public who had never heard of Julien Archer or George McMorris, were kept strictly in the dark about it.

Julien and George discussed these disclosures coming up in the train from Dover for they were inclined to treat their engagement as a new and enchanting game.

" Of course we mustn't tell a soul until the cable comes, but I daresay if I go about ostentatiously waving my ring someone will notice," said Julien hopefully. " I might manage to leave my left glove at home."

" Or I could be found kissing you at odd moments," suggested George. " That would be so nice for the onlookers and we could always swear them to secrecy which would be as good as the *Morning Post* any day, and so very much more subtle."

" My dear children, don't worry. Your faces are quite eloquent enough," Frances assured them. " But I suppose you will tell Mrs. Standish, George ? "

" Of course he must," said Julien, " and I'll positively have to tell Olive and Harry or they will be furious. Let's make a day of it, George, and you go one way and I'll go the other."

" And meet in the middle for repairs," suggested George, " the only thing I stipulate is that you don't ask me to break the painful tidings to Penelope. Knowing her hopeless infatuation for me I don't think

it would be kind. Besides I should hate to be told what an emancipated young person I am marrying. Sounds as if you were a dusky nigger, Julien."

"Instead of which you're *my* slave, aren't you," said Julien encouragingly.

"Oh rather—until marriage do us part of course."

"Don't you mean death?" enquired Julien in clever imitation of Penelope at her worst.

"Same thing! Entirely the same thing," returned George.

"Poor boy, he has written a play and now he thinks he is Mr. Shaw. Julien, I am sorry for you."

But Julien was certainly not sorry for herself, and in her usual wholesale fashion was ready to take the whole world into her confidence. She had brought back to Lavender Gardens a trunk packed full of souvenirs for all sorts of people, chosen with a beautiful disregard for the status of the recipients too, that would have shocked Penelope to the verge of the grave.

So Harris received a box of gloves and each of the other members of the household some trifle equally "above her station," and while the icy parlour-maid unpacked for Miss Archer, she was told about her engagement to Miss Standish's cousin, Mr. McMorris.

"But it is not to be known outside the household at present, Harris, and would you like to see my ring?"

"Very ladylike and proper to mention it if you ask me, Mrs. Fortescue," Harris pronounced downstairs later, "instead of allowing the young gentleman to come here constant and nothing said. And Spiders tearing about in a new collar with his name on a silver plate if you please! That glad to see her he was. He's a rare dog for knowing who's who."

Now that's what I call really smart," she continued holding up the little black lace scarf that was Mrs. Fortescue's present. "Chick, as they say in France, box and all too, bought in a good class shop—I'll be bound. None of your bargain sales. What I like about the whole thing, Mrs. Fortescue, is that you're not regarded as a lot of spies ready to carry the news outside

when it's not wished, and kept in the dark accordingly. 'Only the household is to know at present, Harris' she says, and then the mistress comes in smiling at her and says to me: 'Tell Jenkins to see that you have a bottle of wine up for the kitchen supper to-night, Harris, and I hope you'll all drink Miss Julien's health.' Most considerate all round I call it."

"Lor," said Mrs. Fortescue.

II

Julien wrote her news both to Penelope and Mrs. Crozier as the only way of defeating Penelope's triumph or bad temper. In that household even news of the most neutral kind was never shared without a great deal of harassing mystification, and she remembered that not only had Penelope made a parade of secrecy about letters, invitations, purchases and even books to be chosen from the library, but Mr. Crozier, when he had seen some acquaintance in town made a mystery of that, returning to the subject with hints and irritating chucklings at the density of the other members of the family often for days together. He had all the oddness of his sister, Mrs. Standish, but developed on small and mean lines, and he loved such petty exhibitions.

Next day Julien took Spiders for his morning run by way of Kensington Gardens and the Curtis' flat. Olive had a maid now and was a lady of leisure, so she agreed to walk back a little way with Julien and hear all about the great event. Since all the world couldn't become engaged to Harry she supposed George McMorris was a fairly good substitute as Englishmen went. It was a jolly good job, she said, that Julien was going to live in England because she and Harry were likely to be stranded there for the present too, and the icy glance of most of the natives made her blood curdle. Harry had been learning to fly so that he could personally superintend the trial of the great invention later on, and Olive knew what that meant. Next thing he'd be knocking up against the stars. He always was such a short-sighted beggar.

"I've told him not to expect any sympathy from me

if he does," she declared sternly. "Flying in the face of Providence like that. Men are the limit."

From which it was to be adduced that events were moving very smoothly at the little flat for Olive had not even found it necessary to mention that Harry was the most charming and brilliant person in the world.

Julien indeed heard of the flying project with enthusiasm and exclaimed:

"You know you'll make a ripping wife for a flying-man because you'll never funk."

"Oh won't I!" said Olive with hurried candour. "I tell you, Julien, whenever I think of the beastly thing I can feel myself all curl up inside, but of course I'd never let Harry know. He'd be so jolly conceited."

A few moments later she stopped abruptly and remarked:

"Look here, I don't want to butt in after the manner of the candid friend who is looking for a chance to be catty, but have you realised what you're doing in marrying one of these—*Englishmen*!"

Julien burst out laughing at this protest, and said:

"Poor Olive! don't you like them? But of course George is different."

"Um, they always are," said Olive sadly. "Oh, I'll admit I'm prejudiced. You see Harry and I rather hoped we were going to have you in our family. We thought you and Dick—"

"Dick!—Dick Curtis! Olive dear, you are an old silly," said Julien, and went home pondering the irony of things. Penelope, who had professed a more violent friendship for her than anyone she had ever known, had been afraid she would marry her brother. Olive and Harry, professing nothing at all, had been only afraid she would not marry theirs.

The same night she had letters from Penelope and Mrs. Crozier, and with a good deal of lively curiosity opened that of the former first.

"Dear Julien," wrote Penelope in place of the "dearest" of former occasions, "I cannot say I was surprised at your news for I always thought you were uncommonly friendly with George. As you know I

don't care for him, I won't pretend that I do. All the same I'm sure I hope you may be very happy. It's kind of you to ask me to be your bridesmaid if you're married in England, but are you sure you wouldn't rather have someone else, and in any case I am rather uncertain as I have so many engagements. You may have heard that my cousin, Ida Standish, is to be married in April, and I am to be her first bridesmaid of course. I'm not sure I shan't be married myself shortly afterwards, but as I'm not very keen on men I've not quite decided, so you had better say nothing about it at present. It seems a long time since we have seen anything of you but I suppose you have so many friends in England now that we cannot expect anything else. You are not like me. I always like the old friends best. However, I am glad I was some use in introducing you to George. With love,

Yours affectionately,

PENELOPE CROZIER."

This masterpiece of fiction and innuendo made Julien laugh, but not very mirthfully, and she threw it into the fire before opening the other.

"My dear Julien" wrote Mrs. Crozier, in the course of six long and kindly pages, "now this really is delightful news. Only fancy it, you and George, and I never had the slightest suspicion. You must come and see me directly you can spare a moment and tell me all about it and I shall be able to give you some good advice about housekeeping, my dear, and where you can buy the best butter, which is so very important, as I often tell Penelope. But, dear me, advice of that kind is not much good to her for she is such an unfriendly girl. I'm sure it's no wonder she has never had a lover in her life. A wedding is one of the things I really do enjoy, and in the family too, which of course makes it doubly exciting. You must let me help you to do your shopping and I'll take you to all the cheap places. What a pity we didn't know, when the January sales were on."

III

Julian rather hoped Mrs. Crozier would pass on the news to Tony, though she realised that the chance of that was small. After all, in spite of her momentary suspicion of Julien months ago, she would not imagine the dear boy likely to be interested in such trivial matters. Wasn't he engrossed with his " poor people " down in those dreadful slums. Tony's highly coloured conversation had led his mother to picture Notting Hill as a locality full of murderers, footpads and tumble-down tenements of the Dickens era. If anyone had told her it was a part of the august suburb of Kensington, she would have been shocked at such profanity.

Whether he knew or not Julien sincerely hoped that Tony would have the grace to keep out of the way when she went to the club again, but she foresaw that such tact was extremely unlikely. Tony's shining qualities had suffered a permanent eclipse since her last encounter with him, and although she saw that now as something merely fantastic and absurd, it still left her with a sense of fury because she had been so completely taken in and had so admired and liked him.

Frances drove with her to the club and George was to call for her at 9 o'clock. There at least was consolation. She walked with dignity through the vestibule and upstairs to her class-room apparently looking neither to right nor left, yet missing nothing, even the poster that still shrieked to the world that " Mrs. Frances Cowle, the eminent authoress," would speak on " The Progress of Woman," " date to be arranged." So Tony had not even thought it necessary to remove or alter that ?

At the top of the stairs she met Mr. Hodges who fussily shook hands with her.

" Back again, Miss Archer ! That's right," he said.

Then Reg came out of the library to tell her eagerly :

" Well, I am glad to see you here again if I may say so, Miss Archer, not but what the young lady you sent was most pleasant I'm sure. And they tell me you've been to gay Paree as the saying is ! "

At the mention of Paris the superior Miss Smiley, who

happened to be passing, stopped and joined the group with an air of condescension.

" Parus ? " she exclaimed. " Who's been to Parus ? Oh, Miss Archer ? Really ? Did you go with Cook or the Poly ? "

Julien who did not understand this conundrum all at once, admitted that she had not accompanied either lady, at which Miss Smiley said again in a tone of astonishment and annoyance :

" Well they're quite the best people. What did you think of the arkdy triumph ? "

Julien answered in the weak manner of people thus intimidated that she thought it was very nice."

" Pooh, can't touch the Marble Arch or Hyde Park Corner," declared Miss Smiley briskly, " I said directly I saw it, ' It can't touch our Marble Arch,' I said, and a gentleman in the party told me I was quite correct, as he knew, being in the building line himself. Something common about the arkdy triumph he thought. No I don't think much of Parus myself. It's overdone. Where has it a single building to come up to our Albert Memorial for instance, so refined and elegant ? I'd never waste my money going to Parus again."

Paris thus heartlessly disposed of, Miss Smiley took her departure, and Reg explained confidentially to Julien:

" You mustn't mind her, Miss Archer. She's travelled about a lot, been to Switzerland and I don't know where, and it's inclined to make her what you might call a little dictatorial."

" Oh I see," said Julien, departing to her class-room rather hurriedly at the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs.

Rose Burton meanwhile, apprised of Miss Archer's movements by various picture-postcards, had come early and was looking out for her. The dark rimmed eyes and haggard face told their own story, but as though to counteract that, Rose's expression was defiant and she greeted the other girl with eager cheerfulness.

" Well you do look A1," she exclaimed.

Julien laughed and suddenly putting an arm round her, kissed her on the cheek, at the same time holding

out her left hand for Rose's inspection by way of stifling her protests at so soft an exhibition.

"*Sissy*," said Rose with affected scorn, but she held on to the friendly hand, exclaiming suspiciously:

"It's not *him*?"

"My pink and white friend, as you call him? No, indeed it is not. His name is George McMorris. He is Mr. Crozier's cousin."

"I don't believe there's one of 'em good enough for you," said Rose fiercely, "a lot of *men*! And you wasting your time sending postcards to me too. I don't know where you were brought up."

Then her glance meeting Julien's wavered a little and she turned away to gather up her books.

"It's worth living for, just to see you again," she said with sudden fervour.

"Rose, you simply must let me help you to get away from him," exclaimed Julien, quickly translating this outburst to the detriment of the gentlemanly father. "Throw everything up and come away to-night. I'll take you home with me till the morning and then we'll find you a room somewhere and get you something to do. I'm certain it can be managed and it's just criminal that you should have to go on like this."

"Don't you worry your little head about me," said Rose recovering herself instantly, "why the old devil would be after me in two shakes, and after you too for helping me. Think there's no one in this club to put him on to my tracks? Oh I can wait. I'll wait till I'm not coming to the club and it can't be fastened on to you. I'd like to see myself letting you get mixed up in my shindies indeed. Just you come and tell me how I'm getting on with this shorthand, that's all."

Then as Julien was about to comply she enquired suddenly:

"Does he know—the pink and white one?—about you, I mean?"

"I'm not sure, but I don't think so."

"Ah," said Rose darkly, "nasty knock for him. Good enough too I reckon."

That Tony did not know and was expecting no nasty

knock of the kind was evident from his appearance when he came in search of Miss Archer at the close of the class. He had heard of her return from Reg, and had straightway shut himself in his office where he kept a mirror and certain articles for the proper care of his manly beauty. Tony knew the effect of a shining presence on the weak feminine mind and the susceptible feminine heart. He had found indeed that most of the big things of life depend on the impression you can make, and this in its way was quite a big thing he supposed. He was really very fond of Julien and though she had been such a little spitfire over the Cowle affair, he was willing to overlook all that because she was only a woman after all. He could afford to be magnanimous and treat the affair as though it had never been. The Burton girl was still in the class-room when he went in, and he made a mental note of the fact that she would have to be warned not to hang about in this way. It didn't do, created bad feeling with the other members of the class. At the same time he smiled his most charming and friendly smile at Julien, and exclaimed jovially :

" Hullo, Julien old girl, safely back again ? "

" Oh, good evening," said Julien without any great show of interest, and went on giving directions to Rose Burton. Tony sat on the table, hands in pockets, watching them good-temperedly, and, as soon as Julien had finished speaking, he remarked to Rose :

" I say, what-do-you-call-it ? wish you'd go and give these keys to Reg for me, there's a dear girl, and say I want him to lock up the office to-night."

Rose looked at him.

" Lost your flunkey, haven't you ? " she enquired, but she took the keys and left the room evidently seeing that Miss Archer would not be likely to give " the pink and white one" the nasty knock in her presence. Rose would not have hindered that for the world.

" Ready to come along ? " enquired Tony, descending from the table as Julien proceeded to collect her belongings.

" Um ? " said Julien absently. " Did you speak ? "

" I only asked if you were ready to come home, but I see you are. I say, Julien, what a ripping hat. Paris I suppose."

Julien ignoring this tactful little touch, enquired in some bewilderment:

" But surely you got my letter? I told you I shouldn't trouble you to bring me to and from the club any more. It's only wasting your time and I've made other arrangements."

Tony laughed.

" Pooh," he said, " think I didn't know that was just a bit of temper? You can't kid me. Come along now, Julien, let's kiss and be friends."

He tried to put an arm about her but Julien slipped deftly away.

" Your customs in England seem to be curious," she said in a voice that was dangerously polite, " where I live we are not in the habit of kissing our male acquaintances."

" Well of all the—*male acquaintances* indeed!" Tony's voice was distinctly hurt and he was shocked that any girl he had chosen to be fond of should show such a thoroughly unpleasant spirit. He even began to think he must have been mistaken in Julien Archer.

" You shouldn't talk like that, Julien," he told her in a tone of kindly but regretful reproof.

Julien received this touching advice without enthusiasm.

" You rather asked for it, didn't you?" she said drily, " and if you object to my words I certainly object to your actions, so it seems to me we are quits."

She went to the door, opened it and turned back faintly smiling at him.

" Good night, Tony," she said. " Oh, and by the way perhaps you will be interested to hear I am engaged to be married—to George McMorris."

The next moment Tony was alone, gazing blankly at the closed door.

" The little cat," he exclaimed, " the absolute little cat!" Then as a thought struck him, he gave a slow whistle of delighted surprise.

"Damned if I'd like a girl to marry me out of spite against another chap," was his consoling thought.

IV

George meanwhile was contemplating, not without a little grim amusement at his own expense, the announcement to the household at Buckingham Gate. Although he would have scorned to put it so, he was perhaps conscious of having come back from Paris to a new life, in the birth of which the night at Silver Ridges, his somewhat nebulous experience on Westminster Bridge, his cousin's engagement, and—to crown all—Julien, had been curiously united. He marvelled a good deal that he had been so slow to realise his passion—he was far too fastidious ever to have been given to promiscuous excursions in that direction—and now it absorbed him with a secret violence so that he viewed the world in general from a new plane. From this inspection Ida Standish at least emerged triumphant, for if the course of true love was running smoothly in utter defiance of the proverbial regulations, wasn't she indirectly responsible for that? He shuddered to think how anything but smooth that same course might have been, had not Ida rather rudely awakened him from his delusions by announcing her engagement. He could not yet decide whether she had been in the least conscious of the snub she had so aptly administered, but if so his sense of justice told him she deserved to be allowed to follow it up, to complete it so to speak, and therefore it was to her ears first of all that his announcement was to be directed.

They were in London at the moment, for Mrs. Standish never would spend much of the winter at Fields. She said wet weather in the country bored everybody, and boredom ought to be a capital offence if the Government only knew what it was talking about, which of course it never did. On this occasion she might have given in to Ida's sudden interest in Warwickshire had there not been her trousseau to think about. Having only one daughter, Mrs. Standish saw that she would have to get all the fun she could out of this solitary matrimonial occasion.

George walked to Buckingham Gate by way of St. James' Park, through the misty February afternoon, watching the faint pale winter sunset throwing little clouds of pink across the sky, and against their drifting beauty the delicate, dark tracery of the leafless trees. It was one of those days when Spring seems to have looked in to say he'll be along later, and the old earth, trying to show that she is doing perfectly well without him, has put on her best bib and tucker. Everywhere the flower baskets were a riot of gold, piled-up feathery wattle or mimosa, the first daffodils, fat gold tulips, nodding bunches of narcissus. In the park snowdrops and crocuses were out in prim battalions, and the pampered swans sailing the waterway were like newly sculptured marble, so motionless and white. There was an odd fictitious warmth in the air, and to McMorris the people who went by muffled in furs and wraps, seemed oddly out of the picture. But presently he saw a young girl who had put a white collar over her shabby coat, and his eyes followed her with pleasure for that little touch of celebration. At the park gates an old flower woman, with her load of treasure, accosted him. She called him " dear " and he laughed, resisting an impulse to buy the entire golden basketful for Ida, because the thought of his arrival in the Standish drawing-room so æsthetically accompanied, was too much for his sense of humour. But he gave the old woman sixpence and fastened a tiny spray of mimosa in his button-hole. It was the same instinct of youth that had moved the girl in the white collar.

Ida was alone when he reached Buckingham Gate, it had been an easy matter with the aid of the telephone and a confidential butler to discover when such an accident was likely; and she also seemed to have seen the Spring looking in, for one of the long drawing-room windows was open and daffodils nodded from every corner of the room. Ida herself, a pleasant foreground for any picture, jumped up to meet him with an exclamation of delight.

" Why, George, I thought you were in Paris," she declared.

"Aha!" said McMorris darkly, after the manner of the properly-brought-up stage villain. "Where is that infernal scoundrel of a Callendar?"

Probably his expression was, from Ida's knowledge of him, reassuring, for she answered serenely:

"In Warwickshire, you old silly. Why, do you want to thank him for taking me off your hands?"

"Ida, how often am I to tell you it's rude to anticipate another person's statements?" he enquired sternly and they looked at each other and laughed.

"The fact is," said George, making himself thoroughly comfortable in an easy chair beside her, "I've brought a message. They want you to go round to Lavender Gardens as soon as you can manage it."

"Oh they are back?" enquired Ida with interest. "Frances and Julien have been over to Paris too. I suppose you knew. Did you happen to see them?"

"I believe I did now you mention it," said George mendaciously, "I seem to have a vague recollection—"

"Then, of course, you know Julien is staying for the wedding. George, isn't she a dear? She is going to be one of my bridesmaids."

"Well you needn't be so cocky about it. She is going to be something much nicer than a mere bridesmaid at my wedding."

Ida sat up quickly, but long and eloquent experience of her cousin George had taught her never to believe anything he said on principle, so she said in a tone of polite scepticism that belied the words:

"I beg your pardon?"

"Very well, I'll forgive you this time, on condition it doesn't occur again," he told her magnanimously, but he looked across at her and grinned.

"You'll be able to return that toast rack now?" he said, and Ida for some mysterious reason quite convinced by this cryptic statement, exclaimed fervently:

"Oh George dear, I *am* glad. I believe really you're the most satisfactory person I know."

"Ah," said George, sadly, "now you have lost me you are beginning to appreciate my true worth."

CHAPTER XXIII

ARTHUR STANDISH—WORM

" Yea, thou wert become the kindred, both thine and mine ; and thy birth
To me was the roofing of heaven, and the building up of earth."

William Morris.

I

In London March is the derelict of the year. By that time winter is old and rather draggled, and everyone is heartily tired of the sight of him, and knowing himself disliked he grows pettish as the old will do, and sends his chill winds wailing round the corners, shaking the window frames, telling the world how very different things were when he was young. And the people who consort with him get influenza or bronchitis, for it is no longer wisdom to listen to the old.

But that year the winter grew old very gracefully for once, and March came in like a cavalier with powdered hair, snow such as even the clever people who design our Christmas cards had not seen in London for many a day.

Julien awoke in the morning to find white trees outside her window, and was up in a moment, excitedly invading Frances' room and begging her to come and see. Frances laughed and protested but went of course, standing with her arm round the girl and looking out upon that vista of delicate loveliness, seen through the interlaced white twigs and branches of the tall old patient trees. In this clear morning stillness it was like a new world, the new world that was dawning for Julien, and surely none the less for herself. She held the girl very lightly, there was no violence in the embrace, yet at every touch she was conscious, as she had never been in all these months, of the significance of

their relationship. Julien belonged to her, was part of her life, and it was not only in her young grace and strength that this was a triumphant knowledge.

" Isn't it heavenly ? " exclaimed Julien gazing out of the window with a great sigh of satisfaction, " Oh, I want to go out and roll in it."

Frances looked down at the absurdly thin nightgown of cambric and cobweb lace, and it made her think irresistibly of the dainty robes she had bought long ago for the little Julien to be.

" Baby," she said, her lips pressed suddenly to the girl's arm and then as though to cover the unusual emotion of her voice, " not in that airy garment I hope, though it does look so fetching. What a reckless little goose you are. Go and get your dressing-gown directly."

Julien got it protesting.

" Just fancy thinking of *dressing-gowns*," she said with deep scorn, " and a sight like that outside."

" I'm not," Frances assured her, " I'm thinking of pneumonia and doctors and nurses and an infuriated George sitting on the door-step and demanding my life."

George and pneumonia notwithstanding, Julien did rush out directly she was dressed, taking Spiders with her for a riot in the garden, and Frances came down to find her hurrying in with an armful of damp and rather injured little dog, the pair of them leaving a trail of melted snow across the library floor.

" Julien, Julien, when will you grow up ? Now go upstairs and change your damp things this instant," she ordered sternly. But even that parental protest was ineffably sweet to make, and when Julien took it in the spirit in which it was offered and ran off gaily whistling, she thought life could hardly offer her a greater joy than that.

Traffic and the unromantic minions of the County Council had cleared the snow from the front of the house by noon, but in the gardens it lay undisturbed all day, melting slowly and imperceptibly, until the green world appeared again renewed and smiling.

It seemed to Frances that so in these days her own life had been renewed. She felt young, and she knew a peace and happiness that she had never experienced before. Doubts and terrors of herself ceased to trouble her, and the hardness that had been her self-protection dropped away so that she was no longer irritable and exacting but eagerly ready to be pleased, and almost as full of absurd laughter as the girl herself. She made no pretence of work at this time, and the feint of the secretaryship lapsed of its own accord, because pretexts had somehow become unnecessary. Her love for Julien was no longer a secret thing and she gave herself to the girl's young happiness with unstinting hands, for henceforward didn't they belong indisputably to each other, and by and by wasn't Julien to be told about that? . . . but no one else of course. It was to be their secret together, the one acknowledgment of the bond between them. The girl loved her, and was to spend the rest of her life here in London, far away from her old associations, therefore wasn't it due to her that she should be told the truth? And she would keep silent, if only for the sake of the other woman she had called her mother, and the children who would be the innocent victims of any disclosure. Frances was wonderfully sure of Julien's complete sympathy and understanding in this thing that she had done all those years ago. Except in the realisation of how it might have affected the girl, she herself had known neither regrets nor doubts on that subject, and she was convinced that in similar circumstances she would do the same again. That for years had been the most insistent thought she knew.

She had no advanced views on the subject of marriage. In those years of her early married life under the dominion of the old woman who had managed not only *her* home but *her* husband and *her* child, she had had no views at all except those forced upon her by harsh experience, and from that she had brought one passionate and unchangeable conviction, that all human bonds that threatened the proper and peaceful conduct of

life should be broken, as much for the welfare of the community as the individual. And there in France twenty-one years ago the "death" of Elizabeth Archer had broken hers, naturally, without scandal, without pain or harm to anyone concerned. She had seen the solution in a flash, had grasped it in the absolute certainty that she could not return to the old harassing conditions without violence, and to the consequent detriment not only of herself, but of her husband and the child who was her father's daughter. Although she had not at the time foreseen the second marriage it is unlikely that the possibility would have altered her decision, because she was abundantly sure of her own capacity for silence. That point certain, the second wife's position in the eyes of law, of the community, and of herself, would be unassailable of course, and Frances was too logical to imagine that any act entered upon in perfect good faith, could be surcharged with moral responsibility for the victim. The moral responsibility, if any, belonged to her, and she shouldered it willingly, seeing in it an immeasurably lesser evil than that she should have returned to the tumult of the divided house. Meanwhile the silence that was her protection became equally the protection of the other woman and her children. For the same reason that she had kept the secret all these years, Julien she knew would keep it now.

II

While they waited for the cable from Julien's people that would determine the place of the wedding, Frances held back her disclosure, ultimately deciding that it would be wiser to say nothing until the girl's return from Australia. After all she could afford to wait for that crowning happiness, and her natural sense of justice told her that the stepmother who had so cared for Julien all these years deserved to find her unchanged and unspoiled for this one time at least. This little sacrifice gave her a sense of security too, for it was like a toll to the controlling forces. She had noticed that

when the wheels of life run smoothly it is a sure sign there is a payment falling due.

Meanwhile she and Julien were delightfully busy with the all-important matter of the trousseau, for, though Paris had provided them with many lovely things, no woman is going to crowd such absorbing purchases into a fortnight when she has months to squander on them. Julien had ceased to protest against her friend's extravagance in this direction, but not to wonder at it, and her continual delight in every little detail was a far greater payment than she guessed.

"Do you know," she had said suddenly to Frances one day soon after their return from France, "I have some money of my own. It's quite a little of course—about £700. Some day I'll have more from father I suppose, or he may give it to me when I'm married. But this was my mother's money, and somehow I like to have that. She didn't make a will, so father and I had it between us, but he kept his share for me because he thought she would have liked that. Wasn't he a dear?"

Frances had to admit a little guiltily that he was. Such delicacy of perception was not one of the things she had expected of the man she remembered.

It reminded her too of some other money that one day she intended Julien to have, and it occurred to her that she must make her will without delay.

They had a small dinner party that night by way of an informal celebration of the engagement, the guests being the Standishes, and Callendar, Harry and Olive Curtis, George and a friend named Oliver. Frances had included the young Curtises this time without hesitation, that fear like every other, having dropped away into the region of the absurd. It was an entirely undignified and hilarious gathering, with favours and an appropriate line of doggerel for each of the guests, and Frances was for once so much a part of all this foolishness that Mrs. Standish began to cast a calculating eye upon her brother-in-law. To have that old affair tidily settled up at this crisis would give a final polish to

the rather scintillating occasion, but she foresaw that it was perhaps too much to expect. Life, she said, was inclined to follow the lead of our realistic novelists who leave out all the things we particularly want to read. Not that she had much to complain of after all, with both Ida and George satisfactorily disposed of. She had been rather afraid the two might marry each other, but that would have shown such a poor sense of economy —been such a waste of opportunity too, and she said to Julien with great satisfaction :

" My dear, I'm delighted that you're going to take that wretched boy in hand. He wants to marry someone from abroad. It will be so good for his insular self-complacence. Every Englishman thinks that the world is bounded by Lord's on the one side and the House of Lords on the other. You will have to improve his mind."

" There ! I knew she'd been trying to marry me to Penelope," said George *sotto voce.*

" Julien you must be one of those improvers people are always advertising for in the *Daily Mail,*" declared Olive. " I've often wondered what they were like. I suppose it's very laudable to want to be improved, but fancy telling the newspapers about it."

" I don't want to be improved," protested George, " I've noticed it generally means *re*proved and I shall see that they put it into the marriage service that Julien is not to improve me in any circumstances."

" That won't help you," Harry warned him, " she'll become a free-thinker for the occasion. These fancy religions have a lot to answer for."

Arthur meanwhile contributed for once very little to the conversation. The sight of Frances looking younger and happier than he had ever seen her, her cheeks girlishly flushed, her dark eyes soft, was bound to bring him anew, since he was a man and loved her, that old conviction of how barren and wasted her life had really been, notwithstanding all the success and distinction in the world. Men have these comforting reflections about the women who will not marry them.

And that this change in her was just part of her devotion to a girl, who though a charming enough young creature no doubt, was still to all intents and purposes a stranger, struck him as pathetic. She was eminently a woman who should have had children of her own—their own.

In the drawing-room after dinner he even gave himself the thoroughly banal satisfaction of standing a little in the background and watching her. Julien had brought Spiders in to join the company, and that ferocious hound, having shown symptoms of a strong desire to eat Mr. Oliver and to bury himself in Ida's chiffon skirt, had at length been reduced to order and was now sitting meekly in the middle of the room, posing as a dog of the most moderate views, and folding and unfolding his ears for the entertainment of the company. Spiders was surmounted by a large scarlet bow to hide the deficiencies of his family tree, but George pointed out to Frances that this was rank snobbery. A beast of such attainments ought to be received in society for his talents alone.

"There is such a thing as the aristocracy of art," he said sternly.

"So I've heard, but I've never met it," Frances assured him.

"'Of course you haven't," said his aunt. "What he really means is the aristocracy of the artful which is the only kind that anyone takes the slightest notice of nowadays. The others whose families came over with the Conqueror, poor dears, are keeping hat shops or rich Americans for a living."

"I've been wondering what on earth was the matter with Olive's hats," muttered Harry.

"But I'm sure I don't see why the dog of the parlour-maid shouldn't wear a scarlet bow," said Julien. "In fact, I'm pretty sure my French phrase book used to allow it."

"That's nothing," objected George, "mine allowed the undertaker to lose his new pink gloves, a thing no properly brought-up undertaker could possibly do."

Frances listened to all this fooling with an indulgent

smile that seemed to include McMorris as well as the girl and to find him almost equally responsive, and at that realisation, Arthur Standish felt a wholly youthful and energetic desire to punch George McMorris's head. Just then, however, Frances, discovering him in the background alone, left the little group and joined him.

"I want you to do something for me, Arthur," she said.

"Are you proposing to me by any chance?" enquired Standish hopefully and with an appreciative look at her grey and silver gown.

She laughed.

"Nothing so drastic. I've been making my will and I want you to be my executor if you don't mind."

Good lord, what a grisly idea, and I do mind, most emphatically... Your will indeed? Why you look about twenty-five."

"Oh, you're not going to get rid of me yet. Don't you know that making a will is as good as an insurance policy for prolonging life!" She added soberly after a moment:—

"There has never seemed any reason to make it before."

"Nor to prolong your life either I suppose. Thanks awfully."

She gave him a faint smile.

"Every reason of course, but I didn't know you wanted my money as well as my life."

"Um," said Standish, grinning, "I suppose I did rather bring that on myself, didn't I? Well, what is it you want me to do, my dear girl, be a kind of guardian angel to these two children of yours?"

"That is it exactly."

Frances looked across at Julien and McMorris and it gave her a little thrill of pleasure to realise how apt his wholly mocking description of them had been, more apt than he would ever know. Now that she had decided to take Julien into her confidence that old fleeting temptation to tell her story to Arthur Standish had entirely left her. It was to be Julien's secret

and her own. But she said with an impulsive desire to make it up to him for that:

"Oh, I'd like to think that if ever anything happened to me you'd look after her, Arthur. I dare say it never will, but it would ease my mind. Don't I know better than anyone else, the kind of friend you can be!"

"I wish you'd try me in a different capacity for a change."

"You wouldn't if you really knew me as I've told you before."

"Knew you! I know you're the woman I love and the woman I ought to have married, and instead of that you've shut yourself up here living the kind of purely intellectual existence for which you are not in the least suited. And like a damned fool I've let you do it."

There was a note of vehemence in his voice Frances had never heard before and she looked at him with new interest.

"I hope you are not proposing to carry me off by force," she said gently sarcastic, but she smiled at him, and after a moment he smiled too.

"Being naturally a poor worm," he said, "I am not sure I shall even succeed in doing that."

Frances immediately recalled the proverbial attribute of the worm but thought it wiser not to mention that.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE OTHER WOMAN

" Dark frost was in the air without,
The dusk was still with cold and gloom,
When less than even a shadow came
And stood within the room."

Walter de la Mare.

I

And then came the day when Julien's cable might be expected at any moment. The girl reckoned that their several letters would reach Adelaide on March 6th at the latest, and was confident her mother would not delay her reply a moment longer than she could possibly help. She was naturally both restless and anxious, and on the morning of the 7th, when the cable had not arrived, Frances decided to take her in hand, carefully parcelling out the day so that she should have little time to think about it. Her own anxiety to know the verdict was swallowed up in her care for Julien. That had become almost an obsession with her.

She had the car round early and they drove to Buckingham Gate for a consultation with Ida about the bridesmaid's frock. Ida and Archie, it seemed, refused to have the fashionable, fancy-dressed wedding of the moment and the five attendants were simply to wear flowery chiffon gowns and flower-wreathed hats to suit the April season. The absorbing discussion of these matters lasted several hours, and then, having telephoned to find the cable still not forthcoming, Frances and Julien went off to meet George for luncheon, spending the afternoon in an orgy of chiffons and silks among the superior young duchesses who dispense these things.

It was a pale, mild, friendly day, with a fringe of mists still clinging to its skirts and little soft cloud

waves breaking on a sea of blue above, not a day that seemed to have any significance, to suggest or threaten anything, yet one to which all her life Frances was destined to look back with dull wonder because she had not foreseen through its brooding quiet, the blow it was to deal her in the end.

It was already dusk when they returned to Lavender Gardens. The mist had deepened and the street lamps looked like an avenue of golden lights running away through a level country. Julien rushed into the house like a whirlwind in search of her cable, but still it had not come, and it was not until they were having dinner—George having joined them to go to a theatre afterwards—that the long-expected bang at the door brought her to her feet. The next moment she had the precious cable in her hand.

She opened it with excited, trembling fingers while the other two cast furtive glances at her and tried to look politely unconcerned.

They saw her smile and then she exclaimed:—"The darling," lifting a flushed face a moment later to explain:—"She's coming for the wedding. Oh, I knew she would, and it's all right of course. Father evidently means we can have it here. He says:—

"Loving congratulations, mother going London wedding, sails Otranto March 10th—Father."

"Aren't they dears! Oh, it's going to be the very nicest wedding there ever was."

II

They had gone at last and Frances was in her room looking round her with vague eyes. She had pleaded a sudden headache and sent them off to the theatre without her. Indeed she looked white enough, but when Julien had anxiously suggested staying at home as well, she had told her roughly not to talk nonsense. She was tired and wanted to be alone.

She often made some such excuse to leave them to

themselves and they supposed this was really at the bottom of it and went off telling each other how extraordinarily nice it was of her. As a chaperone she certainly had all the virtues.

On the way out, Julien came upon Harris, pursuing an errant Spiders who ought at this time to have been shut away downstairs, and she caught him, exclaiming:—

"I'll take him up to Mrs. Cowle, Harris, to keep her company while we are away."

Frances' door was closed, and she opened it softly and put the little dog inside, but though he waved his tail and folded both ears in his best society manner, and even strolled about in search of something to devour, Frances did not even know he was there.

A blind fury possessed her and she walked round the room with swift, aimless steps, taking up things here and there without knowing why, and looking at them with bitter anger through eyes that saw nothing at all.

Coming to London for the wedding indeed! What right had she to come, this woman who chose to call herself Julien's mother? It seemed to Frances that of all the things that had happened yet, this last malignant jest of fate was the worst, the one thing she could not and would not bear. The wedding was to be her affair and Julien's. The girl was to be married here, from her mother's house, and the other woman's presence would be, not only a preposterous intrusion, but utterly out of the question from every point of view. The two people in the world that Frances Cowle could obviously never meet were her husband and his second wife, and here was the latter coolly proposing to force herself upon her without even troubling to consult her convenience. Even if she did not expect hospitality at Lavender Gardens, Julien would want her there and be hurt and surprised it it were not offered. And how could Frances be sure she had never seen her, never seen photographs at all events or learnt a hundred little things about her that might lead to recognition?

Even if these risks were small enough how far could she, Frances, trust her own self-control in all the circumstances? She had dreamed of having Julien gloriously to herself until the moment of her marriage. Wasn't that a mother's right? but if the other woman came, *she* would claim her, would want all those tender little privileges that had become so dear to the real mother's heart. No, Frances was perfectly sure she could not trust herself. For her own sake and everyone else's, the second Mrs. Archer must be kept away.

"We shall have to cable and stop her, we must find some good reason," she told herself.

Then in a flash she saw the obvious solution. She must tell Julien the whole story, now at once, instead of waiting, so that she would see the impossibility of the situation, and between them they could find some good excuse to prevent the other woman's sailing by the "Otranto" on March the 10th.

"That's it of course," she said, speaking aloud in her relief, and Spiders, thinking himself addressed at last by a neglectful world, gave a little whine of assent that brought her eyes to him with a start of surprise.

"Why, you absurd beast, where in the world have you come from?" she exclaimed. She sat down near the fire and held out an inviting hand to him, and Spiders licked the hand, then settled himself on her dress with an air of disarming confidence, looking up at her with soft brown eyes, a very soulful little dog. She drew him nearer to her smiling and stroking his silky coat. The little creature was fond of her, and she was absurdly glad of that, for wasn't it a part of Julien's coming? It seemed to her that almost every good thing in her life was due to that most wonderful accident, and to-night she was to know the crowning happiness of all, the acknowledgment of the motherhood that had been so long a terrified and secret thing.

She sat back in the firelight and swiftly details and incidents came crowding to her with significance, all part of the fabric of her story.

Even now she found them sharply outlined, gigantic

in their very littleness, tearing her patience almost beyond control, and for the time she was back in it all, sick of soul, her whole mind brooding and dark.

She saw before everything else the figure of her mother-in-law, that large, handsome, dominating old woman without a nerve in her body or a smile in her heart, who had greeted the girl Elizabeth when she entered her new home. *Her* home indeed? She almost felt again the tremors of joyful anticipation which had preceded the home-coming, and then the flat, desolate misery of the awakening when she found that it was not after all her home, so much as a house furnished, tenanted and ruled by another woman, and where she was a barely tolerated guest.

The elder Mrs. Archer had looked her up and down with frankly contemptuous criticism, catechised her like a troublesome school-girl, and clearly hoped she was not as flighty and empty-headed as she looked. *She* had presided at her son's dinner-table that night, and the girl Elizabeth who had been looking forward with alternate terror and joy to doing that as the final sign and seal of her new wifely dignity, sat through the meal with a heavy heart, trying to persuade herself it had been done to save her embarrassment. In a day or two, of course, the place would be relinquished to her as the new mistress of the house.

It never was, and when she spoke to her husband about it he laughed and said:

"Let her keep the old place, sweetheart. I want my little girl to sit by me and hold my hand."

In her quiet room Frances could almost hear the words and the pleasant, slightly fatuous voice that had gradually come to irritate her almost beyond endurance. Later, she remembered, she had urged to be allowed to take over the management of the house, but he argued childishly that he wasn't going to have his little angel worrying her pretty head about beef and mutton and getting horrid wrinkles round her lovely eyes. In desperation she had even screwed up courage to broach the subject to her mother-in-law, only to be told with practical finality:

"Stuff and nonsense! You'd have poor William insolvent in a fortnight with your extravagant ways. You young people of the present day are all alike, not an ounce of common sense amongst you."

She had given in of course—she had no choice—and at least, she tried to console herself, it would give her more time for study. She still aspired at that time to be a fitting comrade to the man who merely wanted an unwrinkled angel guaranteed to hold his hand at meals. The woman sitting by her London fire all these years and miles away, smiled scornfully to remember the girl who had devoured Hansard reports and political speeches by the hour to get nearer the serious business of her husband's life, only to find her efforts treated as a good joke in the household, to be repeated upon every suitable and unsuitable occasion. The elder Mrs. Archer had sternly disapproved of her dabbling in such spheres at all and constantly told her friends in her daughter-in-law's presence that Elizabeth would be riding about the country in rational costume next if William didn't put his foot down. These exhibitions of jocularity on the part of the old woman were the things that she had soon come to dread more than anything in the world. As for William himself, he didn't "want his darling girlie pet to worry her little soul about stupid politics and be a blue-stocking. He wanted her to help him forget such things and wear pretty frocks and sit happily at home in the drawing-room."

On looking back Frances was conscious that her mind had developed at that time with extraordinary quickness. It was part of her queer childhood that her reading had always been precocious and now to supplement that she was brought into contact for the first time with the world of thought and action. Her husband's colleagues were often at the house, most of them men of ability in one direction or another. Elizabeth did not talk to them much but she listened a great deal, until even that poor consolation was denied her through the intolerable suspicions and protests of her mother-in-law. Mrs. Archer did not consider a young woman should

listen to any man except her husband, even on such comparatively innocuous subjects as politics and literature. She informed her daughter-in-law that a chit of a girl could not possibly know anything about such things, and practically accused her of a desire for masculine admiration and society. Frances smiled to think how easily she had been appalled in those days. She had retired into herself with flaming cheeks and "listened" no more.

Then there were the awful months before the baby, Julien, came, when she was followed about by the determined old woman with hideous rugs and cushions, not allowed to sit up too long, or to lie down too long, or to go out when she wanted, or stay indoors when she felt inclined. Mrs. Archer had a rule for these things, and she became a victim to that, while the whole household was continually embroiled lest the patient should be excited or upset. As a matter of fact she was very often both, for naturally sensitive and shy she would have liked to hide herself away at such a time. Instead she was exhibited continually to the old woman's friends, who gave her advice, patted her hand and wagged their heads and tongues over her, until she could hardly contain herself from screaming. She had her terrors too when she was appalled at the hideousness of the house and the tumult and revolt of her own mind. Frances recalled the interminable meals when she had sat with her eyes fixed on her plate rather than raise them and see the heavy Victorian furniture and the hideous family enlargements, which like all the pictures in the house, hunted in couples and were so carefully paired on the dull walls. These portraits became monsters to her overburdened imagination. The fear of seeing them haunted her dreams.

Then the baby came, and of a sudden the world was a new and glorious place, but she was very weak and unable to nurse the little creature, only another crime in the eyes of her mother-in-law. That old martinet engaged a capable nurse and between them they ruled the baby's life, while Elizabeth fretted herself sick, too

weak to resist them. It was four months before she was about again, and by that time the child had grown into the perfect image of her father who in his pride at that would have played with her all day long, had the presiding fates permitted. They did not, and when with a burst of tears she had complained to him that she was never permitted to have the baby to herself, he had laughed at her and teased her kindly, reminding her that neither was he. Mere parents were nobody when a nurse and grandmother were about.

To Frances looking back, the most awful experience of that time had been the growing certainty that the child was as good as gold with both of them, but when *she* demanded her and they reluctantly gave her up—never without a great deal of protest and many warnings and directions—she nearly always cried. She remembered one incident with horrible acuteness. She had managed to creep in one day when Julien was alone for a moment in her little crib. She held her passionately in her arms but the baby awakened with lusty howls that brought nurse and grandmother and attendant reproaches. Like a criminal she had crept away and wept her heart out in her own room.

She became morbidly certain that even the helpless baby was against her and a frightful lassitude descended upon her at last so that it seemed that nothing in the world could matter any more. She could not do anything. There was nothing they would let her do, either for her husband or the baby, and she might have been imprisoned in a world that had neither place nor use for her. All her husband's pleadings and her mother-in-law's reproaches had not been able to shake her from this bitter lethargy, and at length, after many contemptuous protests from the old woman, her son had his own way and another doctor was called in.

Frances could recall him vividly even now. He had been young for all his distinction and somehow she had recognised an ally at once and pleaded urgently to be sent away. So she had come to England.

They had put her in charge of friends—her mother-in-law's friends of course, for where had she any of her own?—but she had hated them for that and left them directly after reaching London. Even then any peace of mind the sight of new places might have brought her was shattered by the nightmare of going back, and by the weekly letters from home that dogged her footsteps like an evil thing.

And then she had met Miss Graves, the " companion " at the London boarding-house to which she had gone for greater quiet than an hotel could give her. She had often since pondered the apparently slender incidents that had led to that momentous meeting. Miss Graves was small, delicate, overworked, one of those reduced gentlewomen who were a speciality of Victorian England, with a threatening but furtive little cough, and a pathetic anxiety to please all the people who were determined she should do nothing of the kind. Drawn to her by fellow-feeling young Mrs. Archer had managed at last to persuade her to talk about herself, and learned that she was ill. The doctor had ordered her out of England for the winter but she had no money and not a friend in the world, and was thankful for her present post, because it was at least a roof over her head. The other had instantly divined a mystery but asked no questions for wasn't it only another bond between them? And for the same reason she did not rest until she had found a way of helping her. Miss Graves *should* spend the winter out of England. She herself had now been away five months and purposed going through France and Italy—as slowly as possible—on the way home, since go home eventually she supposed she must, but she knew nothing of the Continent, and was a poor linguist, so that she should have a companion for the journey was the most natural thing in the world. Frances' remembrance of the month that followed had always been a curious medley of swift incident and swifter decision, and the thing that now came uppermost in her mind was the quite inconsequent fact of poor little Miss Graves' delight in Paris. She had

never before been out of England, never even hoped to do so. But suddenly her malady had developed to an alarming degree, the reaction perhaps of this new happiness after long neglect. The doctor advised the South at once, recommending a little village, and they went by easy stages, the invalid wrapped in every luxury her friend could give her.

Rooms had been taken for Mrs. Archer and Miss Graves and not unnaturally the invalid was immediately "Madame" to everyone, her tall dark-eyed companion "Mademoiselle." Her halting French had not been able to correct the mistake, nor had she tried after the first attempt. There had been no time to think of such trifles in the fight for the other woman's life.

That she saw now, had been the beginning of her chance, the chance that came flashing to her when, in spite of all they could do, poor little Miss Graves lay dying, and she sat and watched her with a new sense of misery and desolation. She could remember the details of the room with peculiar vividness, the square window looking out upon the sunlit beach and the calm sea in the distance, the large bed with the figure in the middle of it, so absolutely still, so small and white, the chairs set neatly round the room, the dressing-table, the medicine and glasses ready to the nurse's hand. These things had become almost animate to the girl as she sat there through the slow hours. And then she had seen her chance. "Madame" was dying. Hadn't they told her so? Not poor, friendless Miss Graves but Madame, *Madame Archer!* Why not?

Frances could see now that that day had marked not only the crisis in her affairs but almost as much so in her temperament and nature. Up till then she had been a nervous girl, giving in, for ever giving in, to forces stronger than herself. From that day she became the force that compelled other people, determined, hard, immovable, pitiless too perhaps. With the death of little Miss Graves, extraneous as it had been in a way, she was dimly conscious that something had happened

to the girl Elizabeth. It had been perhaps the breaking point. And she could remember how she had gone about the business that followed with a kind of grim decision, writing the letter (in a hand carefully disguised) to William Archer, announcing his wife's death, giving details of her illness and funeral, enclosing death certificate, receipted bills, even some money—as little as she dared—packing up and sending back to Australia the "late Mrs. Archer's" trunks and possessions.

And then freedom!

Frances could smile now looking round her quiet, charming room, to think of the days that had followed that wonderful release. The bitter friendlessness and hard struggle seemed infinitely far away, but she knew that it was only Julien's coming that made them seem so. She had no personal pride in the place she had built herself single-handed in the world.

She looked up at the little clock on the mantelpiece and saw that it was already long past eleven, and the colour crept into her cheeks at the thought of her moment fast approaching. Very soon Julien would be here. After that they would never really be parted again.

There was a knock at her door and Harris appeared to ask whether she should take Spiders. The little dog was curled in an absurd ball on the hearthrug, and even Harris permitted herself a decorous smile at sight of him.

"He is very happy there, Harris," said Frances. "It seems almost a pity to disturb him. I'll send him down when Miss Julien returns if he gets restless. I'm sure she'd be amused to see him there."

"He thinks a sight of Miss Julien," announced Harris in her hard tone, making up the fire.

Her mistress who had never heard the precise Harris so unbend, smiled almost gratefully.

"He is not uncommon," she said.

"Indeed no, ma'am. Cook and I were only saying she couldn't be more like our own young lady if she'd lived here from a child."

"I hardly think she could," said Mrs. Cowle in an odd voice. Then she added with sudden kindness:

"You must be tired, Harris. Don't wait up. I'll let Miss Julien in myself when she comes home."

"Yes ma'am," said Harris faintly and departed. She was not accustomed to such consideration from her mistress, and Frances realising that with a twinge of conscience, smiled again, for wasn't this new spirit in her household yet another part of Julien's coming?

III

Frances went down to open the door eagerly but her appearance brought a little exclamation of dismay from the girl.

"Oh dearest! we've kept you up, and your poor head! What a shame!"

"Nonsense, my head is quite better and I've had a beautifully quiet evening, thank you both," said Frances gaily, standing just outside the door with her arm around the girl to say good night to George.

"Wanted to get rid of us evidently," observed Julien to the young man, with a grimace.

"Dark horse!" contributed McMorris, having even taken Mrs. Cowle into the family to this extent. "I say, you know, you two look absurdly alike standing there."

It occurred to Frances that at one time such a statement would have filled her with dismay, but now she only smiled, and Julien exclaimed, her head against her arm:

"He flatters me like that to my face, darling. Do you think it's quite proper!"

"I believe you do it on purpose. Plagiarist," George accused her sternly.

"Of course I do. Who wouldn't?"

"Didn't someone mention flattery," said Frances softly in her ear, but of course she loved it, just as she loved the whole of this absurd conversation on her

front steps at midnight, with only the quiet, watching, lamp-lit street to hear. "People who will neither come in nor go home—" she observed suggestively at last, "but I suppose you are waiting to take a last farewell. Good night, you may have two minutes, George."

"Oh but he has," said Julien retreating hastily after her, "before we rang the bell—to spare Harris's feelings—and I know he disapproves of anti-climaxes, because he told me. The play had one."

However, she relented sufficiently to blow him a kiss from the door, then followed Frances gaily upstairs. She still looked excited as she had done on going out and her eyes were brilliant as she flung off her wraps and went to hug Spiders on the hearth-rug.

"Was it a nice play?" enquired Frances watching her.

"I rather thought it was, but George says that is because I have been so badly brought up." Then she added flushing and a little nervous: "Of course it's been just the most glorious night I can remember. Now mother's coming everything seems heavenly. I'd have been too homesick for anything if she hadn't."

"My darling, have we looked after you as badly as all that?" said Frances, recalled to the thought of the other woman with a shock. Her voice sounded a little faint and she held the rail of the bed with a shaking hand. But in a moment the girl was on her feet and had her arms around her.

"Ah no, I didn't mean that. You know I didn't, don't you? If it hadn't been for you I should have gone home months and months ago, from sheer home-sickness instead of staying and having the most gorgeous time of my life. And then I shouldn't have really known George, so it's all your doing, dearest. I think I'm frightfully lucky, for I care for the three best people in the world, mother and George and you."

Her arms were still around her friend but she did not look at her, so missed the bitter pain in her eyes.

"Does she come even before George?" she asked in

a tone of raillery, because it was the only one she dared to trust, and Julien said with a ghost of a chuckle:

"Do you think she shouldn't? Would he be dreadfully jealous? Ah! but mothers are quite different, aren't they?"

"Yet she isn't—your own mother—Julien!"

That was sheer cruelty of course, yet almost equally a wild plea to the girl, but Julien did not know.

"That's what makes it all the more wonderful," she said in the same eager, rather tremulous voice. "She told me all about it when I was pretty young because she was afraid someone else might come and point out to me that she was only my mother by false pretences and I'd be hurt. I had always been quite silly about her because she's so—perfectly jolly, but somehow after that I believe I was sillier than ever, if possible. I never could help thinking how awful it would have been if she hadn't been there. You see, my own mother died, poor darling, and I'd have been absolutely alone. I don't mean that I wasn't awfully fond of father, but fathers aren't quite the same. And instead of that she was always there, all my life, in everything that mattered. That's one reason why I felt—I—couldn't bear it if she were not at my wedding. It's idiotic I know, but it would seem all wrong."

The girl's voice broke suddenly. She choked, tried to recover herself and finally put her head down on the other's shoulder, crying quietly.

Frances' arms were round her at once, her own pain forgotten.

"My precious, you mustn't," she said, stroking her hair with a tender hand. "Don't you know that it's all right, quite all right, and it's going to be the very nicest wedding that ever happened!"

"Oh it is, isn't it?" exclaimed Julien, lifting her head with a little apologetic smile, "I don't know why I'm making such an exhibition of myself and being so dreadfully soppy. I suppose it's because I'm a spoilt little beast."

Frances held her close.

"It's because you're tired and overwrought, my darling," she said, "and now you're going to let me help you to undress and tuck you up in bed this very minute."

IV

Frances came back from Julien's room and began mechanically to prepare for bed, but she didn't really know what she was doing, for all at once the whole fabric of her life had come tumbling about her ears. By and by she saw Spiders, a brown ball on the hearth-rug, and looked at him with distress because he was something new there and she could not think what he was. She went over at last and touched him wonderingly, and Spiders unwound to wag a sleepy tail and blink a little brown eye at her. Then she gave a gasp, laughed, and finally flung herself face downwards on the bed, her whole body shaken with sobs.

She lay there for a long time; it might have been hours or centuries, her thoughts shot with fire and tumbling like gigantic shapes about her mind. It was many years since she had cried, and now the mere physical tumult of it, added to the pain that seemed to be crushing her down, held all her consciousness, so that facts and details were blotted out and only their intolerable shadow remained. She was lying on the outside of the bed in her thin night-dress and the fire was getting low, but she did not even know that she was cold.

The other occupant of the room was less oblivious of his own comfort. Spiders, awakening to find the fire out, sat and gazed at it reproachfully, not accustomed to such behaviour on the part of previous fires he had met, and all at once he became aware of a queer, low sound from the bed. He immediately whined to show his complete sympathy and understanding. When the sound did not cease he decided to investigate, and still whining softly, put two paws on the edge of the bed and proceeded to lick the hand lying there. His touch aroused Frances and she sat up in alarm, her face wild

with tears. Spiders, his whole small person wagging triumphantly at having accomplished so much, jumped on the bed, disgracing Harris for ever, and cuddled himself up beside her.

"You weird creature!" said Frances in a shaking voice and suddenly aware from the warmth of his little body that she herself was stiff with cold. She moved him gently on to the eiderdown, and with a shiver, turned off the light and crept into bed, pulling the bedclothes round her. Spiders, satisfied that he had adjusted everybody's difficulties as became a dog of parts, curled up close beside her with a sigh, and she smiled absurdly comforted and glad to have him there.

She felt sick and tired but she had quite regained her composure, and now her mind was extraordinarily lucid and she seemed to see, as though lit by a clear flame, the whole of her life spread out before her. From that tangle of bitterness, revolt and pain, one thing rose up triumphant and she knew that beside it nothing remotely mattered any more. It was her love for Julien.

"*She was always there, all my life, in everything that mattered.*"

So that was where the other woman had triumphed, where she had failed? She was not afraid to call it failure now, that long-ago desertion. All her poor little shreds of justification and excuse had dropped away, and she could only remember that by going she had exposed the girl at least to the chance of such desolation as in her own childhood she had known and suffered.

But though she had failed Julien once she would not fail her again, and that old story, so carefully guarded all these years, must remain a secret even from Julien—most of all from Julien—until the end of time. The claim that would have been so sweet a thing to make could only mean to the girl, since she cared most for the other woman, a painful and terrifying knowledge that she must carry in secret all her life, and the real mother who loved her knew that she could never put any such intolerable burden upon her shoulders.

So Frances Cowle faced sacrifice and renunciation, though she had no such high words to deck the thing that she had decided to do. At that moment she was perhaps a great woman, but she was as unconscious of it as she had always been of the more material greatness Julien so worshipped. Life had still much to offer her, work, friends, above all the girl's presence and affection, but now she did not consider that any more than she considered how she herself was going to suffer, or doubted her own strength to keep silence for Julien's sake.

If it be true that the best of love is self-forgetfulness, she knew it surely now. And so as the dawn crept in at her window, she fell into a quiet sleep.

V

It was late when she awoke and nearly eleven before she went downstairs. Julien was curled up reading in the library and rose to meet her with anxious concern.

"Dearest, I feel desperately guilty. I'm sure I must have tired you out last night," she said.

Frances kissed her serenely smiling.

"Goose! It was pure laziness. Of course you didn't tire me out. You may be a very marvellous young person, but you'll never manage to do that."

"Ah, you just wait and see," said Julien laughing.

Frances still had a hand upon the girl's arm and now she said:

"What are we doing to-day? More shopping I suppose? And by the way, sweetheart, before we do anything else, shall we go upstairs and decide which room your mother is to have?"

Julien glanced at her quickly, her whole face alight, then dropped a sudden kiss on her hand.

"Oh! I love you," she said.

THE END

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